

# **Teaching the Gothic in Secondary Classrooms**

**An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)**

**by**

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Pamela Hartman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and a long horizontal line at the end.

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## **Abstract**

The Gothic genre is currently at the height of its popularity, especially with adolescents. Therefore, it makes sense that Gothic literature should be incorporated into the English classroom. However, it has been largely ignored. I have created three unit plans centering on the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley each focusing on a different aspect of the Gothic genre: "monster," "transgression," and "sublime." These units allow for students to connect with the novel on a personal level that may not have been possible before these units.



## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Dr. Pamela Hartman for her guidance and advice on this project. Her experience and knowledge were invaluable in the development of these units, and in my development as an English teacher.

I would also like to thank my parents, Dan and Nancy, as well as my sister, Jill, for pushing me to enroll in the Honors College and for being a support system for me here at my time at Ball State University.

## Teaching the Gothic in Secondary Classrooms

Gothic literature is at the height of its popularity in the modern era, especially with young adults. If I were to turn on my television, I would likely find episodes of *True Blood*, *The Vampire Diaries*, *The Walking Dead*, *American Horror Story*, old reruns of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and the list could go on and on. If I were to look at the books that students in middle and high schools were reading, I would be bombarded with copy after copy of the *Twilight* series, *Gone Girl*, the Sookie Stackhouse novels (much to my own disbelief), among others. Library Director, Philip Charles Crawford is also noticing this trend, in his article “A New Era of Gothic Horror,” “Last year, vampire novels were the most requested type of books by my students.” Students are eating this stuff up, so I asked myself, why would I not incorporate it into my classroom? Dr. Pamela Hartman, an Associate Professor of English at Ball State University, tells each and every one of her English teaching methods students that a large percentage of our job as English teachers is merely to get our students interested. Clearly, monsters fascinate students in middle and high schools. Students are drawn to the feeling of being frightened, as evidenced by the sheer number of high school students that flock to movie theaters when a new horror film is released. Therefore, we, as teachers, should take this opportunity to teach our students a genre that is often glanced over but is of high interest to them. In addition to its popularity, the Gothic may allow students to develop the skill of bridging the gap between “then” and “now”—the classics and the contemporary literature.

This project will outline what the Gothic is, define the key terms “monster” “transgression,” and “sublime,” and explain why adolescents are able to identify with Gothic literature. I will highlight a text that is often taught in schools and how it can be used to illustrate these three key terms listed above. I will also discuss specific strategies to use in the classroom when teaching a high-interest topic and how to keep it interesting for the students. For instance, I will describe a short unit and assignment focusing on “transgression,” where we could examine what happens when people push the status quo and try to achieve more than what society deems acceptable. When is pushing the limits okay, and when does it cross a line? With regards to “monsters” we would analyze what “monsters” look like in today’s society. In these units we would discuss topics such as serial killers and mass murderers to get a glimpse into what makes them “monsters.” Were they born evil or did something happen to them? Finally, when considering the “sublime,” we would look at a variety of natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina, the tsunami of 2004 in the Indian Ocean, and the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. As a class we would be asking ourselves, why does the immensity of nature overwhelm and scare us? Why are we simultaneously fascinated by these devastating events?

## **The Gothic**

The Gothic genre is lumped in as a part of the Romantic era. While the Gothic certainly does have Romantic elements, it really does stand out on its own. According to Robert D. Hume in his article, “Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel,” there are four key components of a Gothic novel:

(1) A setting in space or time or both sufficiently removed from the reader of 1800 that there would be no intrusion of everyday standards of factual probability and morality. [...] (2) There is a moral norm present in the story. [...] (3) The action derives from a complex villain-hero. [...] (4) The confusion of evil and good which the Gothic novel reflects in its villain-heroes produces a non-Christian or anticlerical feeling. (286-287)

Based on Hume's description, it can be determined that the primary goal of the Gothic novel is to evoke emotional and questioning responses from the reader, often those of shock and fear.

Fear. Everyone has experienced fear. While the fears themselves vary from person to person, the roots of these fears have remained the same. Typically, it is the idea of the unknown that is the root of fear. For example, during Biblical times, people feared illness because the cause was unknown. They, instead, believed that illness was a sign from God that the infected were sinners, though the sick may not know what they had done. However, today we still fear the unknown, but illness is not necessarily a part of that list because we now have science and medicine. This is very well illustrated in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's book, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. In the first chapter of his book, Cohen puts forth the idea that the monster is always a faction of our culture that we try to hide. "It is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again" (4). The monster, or in this case, fear, exists as a part of our culture that we do not accept and often refuse to acknowledge. Therefore, even the classics of Gothic literature are often still scary, just in a different way than they once were. Everyone connects with that idea of fear. The three key terms are simply small windows that allow us to analyze the

origins of our fear. While the three key terms: “transgression,” “monster,” and “sublime” are three very different concepts, they frequently overlap with one another.

Transgression. In my senior seminar class for the English department, we defined transgression as “exceeding social, literary, moral, or emotional boundaries, which are often regarded with ambivalence” (Huff). Gothic scholar, Fred Botting, further describes the idea of transgression in the introduction to his book *Gothic* as follows:

The terrors and horrors of transgression in Gothic writing become a powerful means to reassert the values of society, virtue and propriety: transgression, by crossing the social and aesthetic limits, serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity, restoring or defining limits.” (7)

Botting goes on to argue that Gothic literature uses transgression not only to uphold the limits and reinforce the status quo, but also to lead to a questioning of these ideals. Gothic literature is not afraid to test the limits of cultural acceptability in its style, characters, or situations. It does so by forcing women into adventurous, or manly, positions in order to complete a task. The ideal of right and wrong are questioned, and with that comes the debate of whether to believe science or the church. Author and philosopher Edmund Burke, in his piece “Sublime and the Beautiful,” suggests that pushing these limits is frightening to people and doing so forces them into the unknown, which leads to the sublime, or a feeling of being completely overwhelmed, but also leading to a moment of transcendence.

In the quintessential Gothic novel, *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, Shelley transgresses the definition of human life. In what is easily considered her

masterpiece, life no longer has to be created through a womb, but can be manufactured. The novel transgresses the line of dead and undead. It pushes the idea of human and beast. Frankenstein's creature is made from corpses, suggesting that it should be dead. However, Frankenstein is able to manufacture life into what was a lifeless body, made from many. The creature is made from human remains, but we must ask ourselves, does that make him or it human? He can think, speak, and has emotions, but is that enough to make him or it human? Shelley's novel pushes moral lines in the creation of the creature, and then through the subsequent decision of whether or not to make the creature a companion.

*Frankenstein* is full of transgressions that lead the reader to think about and fear what is coming next. For instance, in the very beginning of the novel, Victor Frankenstein discusses the genesis of his idea to create life outside of the traditional manner (i.e. the creature): "But what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (Shelley, 23). Frankenstein is going beyond the boundaries of life. He wants desperately to create a way for man to be invincible, aside from a violent death, and to live forever. The idea of eternal life here on Earth then begs the question, what happens in a world where no one can ever die? What will people do knowing that their time on this planet is infinite? What will change?

During the time period in which *Frankenstein* was written, the people were conflicted between the Church and science. Science was now logically explaining many of the phenomena that had once been explained by religion. "The Enlightenment had weakened, but hardly uprooted, established religion in Europe"

(Brians). The people of the time period were beginning to question things, and as the quote alluded, the church was not uprooted because the people were trying to hold on to what they knew. With that, Frankenstein's experiment to create life conflicts with the idea that only God has the power to instill life in someone or something. Rather, his experiment is another instance where science is threatening what was once definitively explained through religion.

Transgression forces the reader to think about what would happen to the world if these existing boundaries were to be passed, and therefore, demolished. Familiarity is safe, and by taking away the familiarity of the way that things are supposed to be, transgression leaves the reader or the characters in the novel feeling exposed and vulnerable to the unknown.

Likewise, monsters often point out a border not to be crossed. In my senior seminar we defined "monster" as the "embodiment of cultural fears in the form of a creature; the monster marks the border between the self and the other" (Huff). In his book, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, Cohen states that the monster is feared for seven reasons: (1) the monster embodies the culture's anxieties, wants, and fears, (2) the monster always escapes, (3) the monster cannot be put into one category, (4) the monster represents everything that people do not want to be, (5) the monster illustrate what is possible, (6) the monster is actually representative of the culture's desires, and (7) the monster is on the line of being human and inhuman. Cohen seems to be suggesting that while the monster is different from humans, it seems to still be very much like a human, just the parts of humanity that we wish to repress (4-20).

The “monster” does not have to be a monster as we often think of it today, with scary teeth, strength, and as some sort of mutant. The Gothic definition of “monster” would suggest that the “monster” is simply the return of what we are trying to hide from ourselves. Perhaps we are hiding our innermost desires, tempers, or hatred. Often, even in the Gothic, “monsters” tend to appear like the monsters that are commonly thought of as some other sort of being, but that is not always the case. The “monster” forces the reader to examine what it is that is being repressed and to confront the idea that we too are capable of horrible things.

In *Frankenstein*, the creature and Victor both provide readers with interesting discussion opportunities about monsters. Is the creature a monster or is the monster Victor? Why is the creature the way that he is? Could the tragic events of the novel have been prevented? Because the story is told from Victor’s perspective can the reader believe what he says? This novel allows for students to explore in depth the term “monster” and to really examine what “monster” looks like in the Gothic.

Often transgression, as well as monsters, can lead to a pinnacle of fear that leads to clarity, otherwise known as the sublime. In Gothic stories, novels, or movies, characters are suddenly pushed into situations that seem so much bigger than themselves. Immanuel Kant, a well-known German philosopher, states:

The feeling of the sublime is, therefore, at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of the imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgment of inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain to these is for us law. (57)



Author and philosopher Edmund Burke in his piece "Romanticism," states that there are nine different sources of the sublime: obscurity, nature, blinding light, difficulty, terror, power, vastness, infinity, and privation (1-20). In these scenarios characters are in the midst of a seemingly dreadful and inescapable place or state, or are stunned by what appears impossible until they reach this moment of ecstasy and clarity. However, it is the dark and overwhelming feeling prior to that clarity that causes great fear.

People seemed to be fascinated by things that they cannot fully understand. How was Stonehenge able to be built, and still be standing to this day? How are phenomena such as tornadoes and earthquakes able to cause so much destruction? How is someone capable of so much hate? These topics, issues, disasters elude us because they are so unfamiliar to us. They fascinate us, but more than that the uncertainty frightens us. This is sublime.

In the novel *Frankenstein*, to read the novel itself is to experience the sublime. As far as the reader knows this could not occur, but what if it could? The reader begins to ask himself/herself what would happen if something like this did occur? How would I react? The reader begins to become immersed in the unknown of a seemingly impossible situation, but simultaneously the reader is getting to know himself/herself better and achieving a level of clarity, as well as an emotional purging in the reality that the novel is fictional. However, specifically in the novel, the sublime is expressly seen when Victor is in the process of creating a mate for his creature. Victor begins to realize the myriad of terrible consequences that could

come from creating yet another being. He destroys the mate, and looks up to see the creature watching him:

The wretch saw me destroy the creature on whose future existence he depended for happiness, and, with a howl of devilish despair and revenge, withdrew. [...] Several hours past, and I remained near my window gazing on the sea; [...] In a few minutes after, I heard the creaking of my door, as if some one endeavoured to open it softly. (130)

In this moment, Victor is terrified. The creature has suddenly appeared and just as suddenly vanished, and now Victor is awaiting the assured retaliation of the creature. However, Victor is completely unsure of where, when, and what that retaliation will be. He is simply immersing himself in the unknown. Yet, he does have that moment of clarity when the creature enters the room and Victor declares that despite what the creature may do, Victor will never create a companion (131). Victor has just experienced the feeling of sublime.

The sublime is the simplest, yet most complex of the key terms. It is difficult to define, but easily identified. It is an emotion, something with which adolescents will identify. Their entire lives are sublime.

## **Adolescents and the Gothic**

Adolescents, in particular, identify with the Gothic genre. In her article "Teaching Gothic Literature in the Junior High Classroom," Wendy Rodabaugh states:

It appears to me that there are five characteristics which are shared by the period of adolescence and the Gothic genre. The first one may be described as extremes of emotion; the second as the journey of self-revelation; third, the individual against the unknown; fourth, rebellion against authority; and, finally, sympathy with the outcast.

In my opinion, the three that can be most easily incorporated into my classroom would be the journey of self-revelation, the idea of rebelling against authority, and having sympathy for the outcast. These traits are exemplified in Gothic literature through the key terms “transgression,” “monster,” and “sublime.” Each term tends to focus most heavily on one characteristic, but is far from limited to a single characteristic. The Gothic is not linear. Elements of the Gothic cannot be cleanly separated from one another, but they are each unique in their own right.

Through observation of students in classrooms that I have visited and my own experience as an adolescent, I can say that adolescents are trying to figure out their place in the world. They long to be accepted by their peers, but simultaneously adolescents are forming their own identities—that likely conflict with the “norm.” They are no longer children, but are not quite adults. To be blunt, adolescents are in an awkward in-between phase in their lives. They feel alone and like outcasts, which plays right into the idea of the monster. Likewise they are testing their boundaries to see just how far is too far, or, in other words, they are transgressing their own stations to find that next level of responsibility and respect by actually testing limits. The concept of transgression upholds the same basic ideas.

Adolescents identify with outcasts, or in the case of the Gothic, monsters. The teenage years are a time for self-discovery and exploration (Rodabaugh), but teenagers do not know how to navigate those often-treacherous waters. Instead, they cling to their peers simply for the sake of not being alone. For that reason, adolescents often feel that they do not belong. Therefore, they conform and morph

themselves so that they can be accepted by a group of people. Yet, they often recognize that they do not entirely “fit.” At the same time, adolescents believe that if they were to be themselves their peers would no longer accept them. So, they often decide that it is better to pretend and feel lonely and miserable in silence. In that regard, they have sympathy for characters that are outcasts. In the Gothic genre, outcasts tend to be labeled as monsters.

Adolescents are going through a great many changes. For instance, changes in their bodies, their relationships, and their schools are occurring simultaneously. This time can be truly overwhelming, and the characters often are not able to look ahead to the future to see that things will sort themselves out, but rather become bogged down with fear of the unknown.

The Gothic offers students the chance to process what it is that they are going through. Granted, these are exaggerated examples of our students’ emotions, but that does not make the Gothic any less valuable in the classroom. Gothic literature can be rather difficult reading, especially for middle school students, because of the more difficult language as well as the darker content. I would gear teaching the Gothic to twelfth-graders. That way the students are able to handle more difficult texts, and because the Gothic is something to which they have likely never been exposed in school, it will be a great way to keep seniors interested in the content.

## **Pedagogy**

When it comes to pedagogy, I believe that the key to teaching Gothic literature in the classroom is time for reflection. In her article, “Teaching Gothic

Literature in the Junior High Classroom,” Rodabaugh discusses how studying the Gothic is in a way a “journey of self-revelation” (70). Whether that journey is through discussion or writing, I believe that, in order for students to even begin to process these concepts and how they apply to themselves, they need to be given a forum in which to do so. Therefore, keeping journals throughout the unit are critical to monitor growth and how well the students understand the fairly difficult concepts.

Developing one’s discussion skills is a technique that is critical for a student, especially high school students. In his book *Strategic Reading*, author and professor, Jeffrey Wilhelm discusses the importance of good discussion to the development of a reader (124). It pushes students to dig deeper and to think about the text rather than regurgitate facts that do not necessarily prove that a student is growing as a reader. Discussion, when it comes to teaching the Gothic, is critical. Because Gothic literature is so emotionally charged for the reader, students have to process what they are reading and the emotions involved, and it helps for them to be able to voice their thoughts and opinions. Students may not really understand how they feel about what they have read, but discussing the Gothic with one’s peers, and hearing their thoughts and reactions, can really help students create their own perspective and opinion.

One of the best techniques to get students to discuss a text is what Wilhelm refers to as the “Three-Index-Card Discussion” (141). In this strategy, each student receives three index cards that represent the number of times each student is allowed to speak. As the discussion begins, as the students wish to speak, they

throw their index card into the middle of the circle. This strategy engages every student, because they must all participate. “Occasionally, it seems that no matter what you do to promote democracy, you end up with a class that is somehow unbalanced in a way that affects discussion” (141). This technique gives more reluctant students an opportunity to speak and forces the more talkative students to choose wisely when to throw their card into the middle. In my experience of using this particular strategy in classrooms, it really does get a group of students talking and the conversations are far richer and valuable than I had previously observed.

When it comes to reading, the reader must be able to interpret what he or she is reading. For better readers, this comes naturally. However, for many students, this skill may not have been mastered yet, and they may need a little help. In his other book, *You Gotta Be the Book*, Wilhelm defines “story drama” as “enacting story suggestions and possibilities, as a way to help [less engaged] readers” (121). Story drama allows students to do more than simply reenact moments from the story or novel, but also has them think about things such as the emotion of the scene, and what the author really trying to convey. These interpretations could take the form of such as satire or interpretative dance. I have had students create a story drama of a short story, and I took the approach of satire. Though the students were not quite as excited about the activity, their end products hit the nail right on the head. Their interpretations were precise, in that they included all of the key elements from the story, and they were able to make their peers, their classroom teacher, and me laugh. They were clearly demonstrating their understanding of satire, and they were able to highlight subtle instances in the piece that if exploited



poked fun at the story. For older students, the satire approach works wonders, in the sense that some students behave in such a way that makes learning seem “uncool”, and with satire they are given the opportunity to openly poke fun at the material. Plus, I am a firm believer that in order to make fun of something well, readers must have a firm grasp on what the text.

While story drama allows the reader to think about the tone or emotion of a piece, the Gothic is a very emotional genre all by itself. The reader is emotionally invested and the characters are often going through turmoil. Therefore, using “story drama,” allows students to exhibit their understanding of the emotions involved. But because Gothic literature is so emotionally charged, students might feel more comfortable exhibiting such emotions while doing satire. Satire allows students to illustrate the emotions without really having to take them on instead of being more vulnerable with their classmates.

There are a myriad of techniques that can be used to teach the Gothic to students, just as a teacher might teach them any other topic or genre. The Gothic is simply another type of literature to which to expose our students. I think what some teachers fear when it comes to teaching the Gothic is the idea that they will have to teach all new novels and short stories, but that is not the case. What teachers may fail to realize is that there are many canonical pieces that we already teach that are certainly Gothic, but we do not teach them as such (e.g. *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte).

## My Project

I designed the following units to allow students to engage with a canonical piece of literature in a way in which the students are more comfortable and which allows them to connect meaningfully with a book that many schools already require. I designed these units so that students are using a variety of strategies that require them to think critically about a text and to put that thinking to use. I wanted to create these units with the idea that I could rotate between them, so that they do not become stale for me, and, therefore, I can be a more effective teacher because I am interested in what I am teaching.

Each unit is three weeks long. Each unit will be examining the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, as well as short stories exemplifying the designated key term. The first unit will analyze the term “monster,” but more specifically will be answering the question “what makes someone a monster?” The second unit examines the term “transgression” and analyzing “where is the line?” The final unit examines the term “sublime,” and students will be answering the question “what overwhelms you?” In each unit, the students will be composing some piece of writing that demonstrates their expertise on that particular key term. For example, the “monster” unit requires that students compose an argumentative essay in which they must argue if they think that Victor is the true monster of the novel or if the real monster is the creature. In each unit, students will be comparing the novel with the film version, noticing the similarities and differences of the role or portrayal of the designated key term. Though these units are each fairly similar to one another,



the lenses through which the students will be looking make these three entirely different units.

Students are often bored with the canon as it is currently taught, and frankly, so are many teachers. I am currently in the middle of my student teaching at Brownsburg High School. My students and I just wrapped up our drama unit in which we read *Macbeth*. I cannot verbalize how many times I heard my students say, “This is so boring!” “Why do we have to read this?” or my personal favorite and the age-old classic, “When am I ever going to have to know this?” Teachers need to find a way to get our students to connect with a piece of literature, and I think that we are going about it the wrong way. My units are an attempt to not only introduce my students to a new genre of literature, but also to simply get them talking about literature in a way that they never have before and in a way that actually interests them.

## Goals for the Units

Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of text, of themselves, and how certain cultures deal with fear; to acquire new information; for personal fulfillment; to visualize the content. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic novels and short stories, theories, film, etc. [based on NCTE Standard 1]

Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, and their word identification strategies. Some of these strategies include: dramatization of a text, vocabulary illustrations, interpretative drawings, and small and large group work and discussion. [based on NCTE Standard 3]

Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a literacy community (e.g. the classroom and their book groups). [based on NCTE Standard 11]

Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g. to inform or to entertain). [based on NCTE Standard 12]

**Where is the line?**

**Looking at “Transgression” in Gothic Literature  
A 3-week Unit Plan**

## Plan for Evaluation

Journals (10)	→50 points
Participation	→25 points
KWL charts	→10 points
Create-A-Sketch	→15 points
Peer editing	→40 points
Venn diagrams from film	→10 points
Final paper	→100 points
<b>Total Points</b>	<b>=250 points</b>

# Planning Calendar

<p><b>Day 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Introduction to the Gothic, "transgression," and <i>Frankenstein</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read Botting's article</p>	<p><b>Day 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Small and large group discussion of article</li> <li>•Define "transgression"</li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read <i>Frankenstein</i> p. 3-30</p>	<p><b>Day 3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Define "horror" and "terror"</li> <li>•Fill out KWL chart for <i>Frankenstein</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar"</p>	<p><b>Day 4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Create-a-Sketch of transgression in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar"</li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read p. 31-57</p>	<p><b>Day 5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Viewing similarities and differences between various creation scenes</li> <li>•Discuss</li> <li>•Assign paper</li> </ul>
<p><b>Day 6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Historical context for transgression activity</li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read p. 57-86</p>	<p><b>Day 7</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Groups will present their historical moment</li> <li>•Discuss each topic and how they relate.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Day 8</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Compare and contrast examples</li> <li>•Compare and contrast Victor and the creature.</li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read p. 86-115</p>	<p><b>Day 9</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Story drama with a scene of their choice.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Day 10</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Paper work day</li> <li>•One-on-one conferencing</li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read p. 115-158</p>
<p><b>Day 11</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Peer editing</li> <li>•One-on-one conferencing</li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read p. 158-179</p>	<p><b>Day 12</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Discuss if <i>Frankenstein</i> is "horror" or "terror" and the ending</li> <li>•Introduce the film and activity.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Day 13</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Film and annotations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Day 14</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Film and annotations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Day 15</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Finish film</li> <li>•Film discussion</li> <li>•Turn in papers</li> </ul>

## Day 1

### Objectives

1. Students will preliminarily define the term “transgression.”
2. Students will be able to identify characteristics of Gothic literature.
3. Student will be able to define the term Goth orally.
4. Students will be able to provide modern examples of the Gothic in popular culture.

### Materials

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Copy of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley
- Copies of Fred Botting’s piece “Gothic Excess and Transgression.”

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- Small group discussion
- Large group discussion

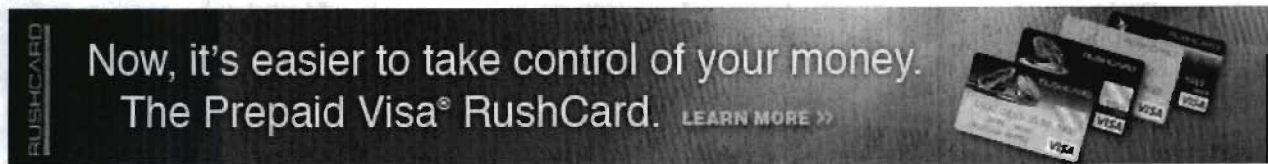
### Procedure

1. Write prompt on the board, “What is a transgression?”
2. Quick-write: students answer the question posed on the board. (5 min.)
3. Explain that this question is what we will be answering throughout the unit.
4. As a class, students will shout out characteristics of the Gothic. (5 min.)
5. As a class, we will develop a definition for the Gothic. (5 min.)
6. Working in groups of three or four students, the students will brainstorm modern examples of the Gothic in popular culture. (10 min.)
7. Each group will share at least one of their examples of modern Gothic. (5 min.)
8. Willing students will share their responses to the question posed on the board. (5 min.)
9. As a class, we will have a discussion about what monsters are, and what makes them monsters. (10 min.)
10. Brief introduction to *Frankenstein*. (5 min.)
11. Students will be provided copies of “Gothic Excess and Transgression” to read for homework.

## **Evaluation**

1. Through eventual collection of the quick-write, as well as through sharing I will evaluate if each student is able to preliminarily define the term "transgression."
2. Through class discussion, I will evaluate the students' ability to recognize characteristics of the Gothic.
3. Through class discussion and collaboration, I will evaluate the students' ability to develop a suitable definition for the term "Gothic."
4. Through sharing, I will evaluate the students' ability to determine a suitable example of the Gothic in popular culture.





Short Stories

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Brander Matthews (1852–1929). The Short-Story. 1907.

## XIII. What Was It? A Mystery

By Fitz-James O'Brien

It is, I confess, with considerable diffidence that I approach the strange narrative which I am about to relate. The events which I purpose detailing are of so extraordinary and unheard-of a character that I am quite prepared to meet with an unusual amount of incredulity and scorn. I accept all such beforehand. I have, I trust, the literary courage to face unbelief. I have, after mature consideration, resolved to narrate, in as simple and straightforward a manner as I can compass, some facts that passed under my observation in the month of July last, and which, in the annals of the mysteries of physical science, are wholly unparalleled.

I live at No.— Twenty-sixth Street, in this city. The house is in some respects a curious one. It has enjoyed for the last two years the reputation of being haunted. It is a large and stately residence, surrounded by what was once a garden, but which is now only a green inclosure used for bleaching clothes. The dry basin of what has been a fountain, and a few fruit-trees, ragged and unpruned, indicate that this spot, in past days, was a pleasant, shady retreat, filled with fruits and flowers and the sweet murmur of waters.

The house is very spacious. A hall of noble size leads to a vast spiral staircase winding through its center, while the various apartments are of imposing dimensions. It was built some fifteen or twenty years since by Mr. A— —, the well-known New York merchant, who five years ago threw the commercial world into convulsions by a stupendous bank fraud. Mr. A— —, as every one knows, escaped to Europe, and died not long after of a broken heart. Almost immediately after the news of his decease reached this country, and was verified, the report spread in Twenty-sixth Street that No.— was haunted. Legal measures had dispossessed the widow of its former owner, and it was inhabited merely by a care taker and his wife, placed there by the house agent into whose hands it had passed for purposes of renting or sale. These people declared that they were troubled with unnatural noises. Doors were opened without any visible agency. The remnants of furniture scattered through the various rooms were, during the night, piled one upon the other by unknown hands. Invisible feet passed up and down the stairs in broad daylight, accompanied by the rustle of unseen silk dresses, and the gliding of viewless hands along the massive balusters. The care taker and his wife declared that they would live there no



longer. The house agent laughed, dismissed them, and put others in their place. The noises and supernatural manifestations continued. The neighborhood caught up the story, and the house remained untenanted for three years. Several persons negotiated for it; but somehow, always before the bargain was closed, they heard the unpleasant rumors, and declined to treat any further.

It was in this state of things that my landlady—who at that time kept a boarding-house in<sup>4</sup> Bleeker Street, and who wished to move farther up town—conceived the bold idea of renting No.—Twenty-sixth Street. Happening to have in her house rather a plucky and philosophical set of boarders, she laid down her scheme before us, stating candidly everything she had heard respecting the ghostly qualities of the establishment to which she wished to remove us. With the exception of two timid persons,—a sea captain and a returned Californian, who immediately gave notice that they would leave,—all of Mrs. Moffat's guests declared that they would accompany her in her chivalric incursion into the abode of spirits.

Our removal was effected in the month of May, and we were all charmed with our new<sup>5</sup> residence. The portion of Twenty-sixth Street where our house is situated—between Seventh and Eighth Avenues—is one of the pleasantest localities in New York. The gardens back of the houses, running down nearly to the Hudson, form, in the summer time, a perfect avenue of verdure. The air is pure and invigorating, sweeping, as it does, straight across the river from the Weehawken heights, and even the ragged garden which surrounded the house on two sides, although displaying on washing days rather too much clothesline, still gave us a piece of greensward to look at, and a cool retreat in the summer evenings, where we smoked our cigars in the dusk, and watched the fireflies flashing their dark-lanterns in the long grass.

Of course we had no sooner established ourselves at No.—than we began to expect the<sup>6</sup> ghosts. We absolutely awaited their advent with eagerness. Our dinner conversation was supernatural. One of the boarders, who had purchased Mrs. Crowe's "Night Side of Nature" for his own private delectation, was regarded as a public enemy by the entire household for not having bought twenty copies. The man led a life of supreme wretchedness while he was reading this volume. A system of espionage was established, of which he was the victim. If he incautiously laid the book down for an instant and left the room, it was immediately seized and read aloud in secret places to a select few. I found myself a person of immense importance, it having leaked out that I was tolerably well versed in the history of supernaturalism, and had once written a story, entitled "The Pot of Tulips," for *Harper's Monthly*, the foundation of which was a ghost. If a table or a wainscot panel happened to warp when we were assembled in the large drawing-room, there was an instant silence, and every one was prepared for an immediate clanking of chains and a spectral form.

After a month of psychological excitement, it was with the utmost dissatisfaction that we<sup>7</sup> were forced to acknowledge that nothing in the remotest degree approaching the supernatural had manifested itself. Once the black butler asseverated that his candle had been blown out by some invisible agency while he was undressing himself for the night; but as I had more than once discovered this colored gentleman in a condition when one candle must have appeared to him like two, I thought it possible that, by going a step farther in his potations, he might have reversed his phenomenon, and seen no candle at all where he ought to have beheld one.

Things were in this state when an incident took place so awful and inexplicable in its<sup>8</sup> character that my reason fairly reels at the bare memory of the occurrence. It was the tenth of July. After dinner was over I repaired with my friend, Dr. Hammond, to the garden to smoke my evening pipe. The Doctor and myself found ourselves in an unusually metaphysical mood. We lit our large meerschaums, filled with fine Turkish tobacco; we paced to and fro, conversing. A strange perversity dominated the currents of our thought.



They would *not* flow through the sun-lit channels into which we strove to divert them. For some unaccountable reason they constantly diverged into dark and lonesome beds, where a continual gloom brooded. It was in vain that, after our old fashion, we flung ourselves on the shores of the East, and talked of its gay bazaars, of the splendors of the time of Haroun, of harems and golden palaces. Black afreets continually arose from the depths of our talk, and expanded, like the one the fisherman released from the copper vessel, until they blotted everything bright from our vision. Insensibly, we yielded to the occult force that swayed us, and indulged in gloomy speculation. We had talked some time upon the proneness of the human mind to mysticism, and the almost universal love of the Terrible, when Hammond suddenly said to me, "What do you consider to be the greatest element of Terror?"

The question, I own, puzzled me. That many things were terrible, I knew. Stumbling over a corpse in the dark; beholding, as I once did, a woman floating down a deep and rapid river, with wildly lifted arms, and awful, upturned face, uttering, as she sank, shrieks that rent one's heart, while we, the spectators, stood frozen at a window which overhung the river at a height of sixty feet, unable to make the slightest effort to save her, but dumbly watching her last supreme agony and her disappearance. A shattered wreck, with no life visible, encountered floating listlessly on the ocean, is a terrible object, for it suggests a huge terror, the proportions of which are veiled. But it now struck me for the first time that there must be one great and ruling embodiment of fear, a King of Terrors to which all others must succumb. What might it be? To what train of circumstances would it owe its existence?

"I confess, Hammond," I replied to my friend, "I never considered the subject before. That there must be one Something more terrible than any other thing, I feel. I cannot attempt, however, even the most vague definition."

"I am somewhat like you, Harry," he answered. "I feel my capacity to experience a terror greater than anything yet conceived by the human mind,—something combining in fearful and unnatural amalgamation hitherto supposed incompatible elements. The calling of the voices in Brockden Brown's novel of 'Wieland' is awful; so is the picture of the Dweller of the Threshold, in Bulwer's 'Zanoni'; "but," he added, shaking his head gloomily, "there is something more horrible still than these."

"Look here, Hammond," I rejoined, "let us drop this kind of talk, for Heaven's sake!"

"I don't know what's the matter with me to-night," he replied, "but my brain is running upon all sorts of weird and awful thoughts. I feel as if I could write a story like Hoffman to night, if I were only master of a literary style."

"Well, if we are going to be Hoffmanesque in our talk, I'm off to bed. How sultry it is! Good night, Hammond."

"Good night, Harry. Pleasant dreams to you."

"To you, gloomy wretch, afreets, ghouls, and enchanters."

We parted, and each sought his respective chamber. I undressed quickly and got into bed, taking with me, according to my usual custom, a book, over which I generally read myself to sleep. I opened the volume as soon as I had laid my head upon the pillow, and instantly flung it to the other side of the room. It was Goudon's "History of Monsters"—a curious French work, which I had lately imported from Paris, but which, in the state of mind I had then reached, was anything but an agreeable companion. I resolved to go to sleep at once; so, turning down my gas until nothing but a little blue point of light glimmered on the top of the tube, I composed myself to rest.

The room was in total darkness. The atom of gas that still remained lighted did not illuminate a distance of three inches round the burner. I desperately drew my arm across my eyes, as if to shut out even the darkness, and tried to think of nothing. It was in vain. The confounded themes touched on by Hammond in the garden kept obtruding themselves on my brain. I battled against them. I erected ramparts of would-be blankness



of intellect to keep them out. They still crowded upon me. While I was lying still as a corpse, hoping that by a perfect physical inaction I should hasten mental repose, an awful incident occurred. A Something dropped, as it seemed, from the ceiling, plumb upon my chest, and the next instant I felt two bony hands encircling my throat, endeavoring to choke me.

I am no coward, and am possessed of considerable physical strength. The suddenness of the attack, instead of stunning me, strung every nerve to its highest tension. My body acted from instinct, before my brain had time to realize the terrors of my position. In an instant I wound two muscular arms around the creature, and squeezed it, with all the strength of despair, against my chest. In a few seconds the bony hands that had fastened on my throat loosened their hold, and I was free to breathe once more. Then commenced a struggle of awful intensity. Immersed in the most profound darkness, totally ignorant of the nature of the Thing by which I was so suddenly attacked, finding my grasp slipping every moment, by reason, it seemed to me, of the entire nakedness of my assailant, bitten with sharp teeth in the shoulder, neck, and chest, having every moment to protect my throat against a pair of sinewy, agile hands, which my utmost efforts could not confine—these were a combination of circumstances to combat which required all the strength and skill and courage that I possessed.

At last, after a silent, deadly, exhausting struggle, I got my assailant under by a series of incredible efforts of strength. Once pinned, with my knee on what I made out to be its chest, I knew that I was victor. I rested for a moment to breathe. I heard the creature beneath me panting in the darkness, and felt the violent throbbing of a heart. It was apparently as exhausted as I was; that was one comfort. At this moment I remembered that I usually placed under my pillow, before going to bed, a large yellow silk pocket handkerchief, for use during the night. I felt for it instantly; it was there. In a few seconds more I had, after a fashion, pinioned the creature's arms.

I now felt tolerably secure. There was nothing more to be done but to turn on the gas, and, having first seen what my midnight assailant was like, arouse the household. I will confess to being actuated by a certain pride in not giving the alarm before; I wished to make the capture alone and unaided.

Never losing my hold for an instant, I slipped from the bed to the floor, dragging my captive with me. I had but a few steps to make to reach the gas-burner; these I made with the greatest caution, holding the creature in a grip like a vice. At last I got within arm's-length of the tiny speck of blue light which told me where the gas-burner lay. Quick as lightning I released my grasp with one hand and let on the full flood of light. Then I turned to look at my captive.

I cannot even attempt to give any definition of my sensations the instant after I turned on the gas. I suppose I must have shrieked with terror, for in less than a minute afterward my room was crowded with the inmates of the house. I shudder now as I think of that awful moment. *I saw nothing!* Yes; I had one arm firmly clasped round a breathing, panting, corporeal shape, my other hand gripped with all its strength a throat as warm, and apparently fleshly, as my own; and yet, with this living substance in my grasp, with its body pressed against my own, and all in the bright glare of a large jet of gas, I absolutely beheld nothing! Not even an outline,—a vapor!

I do not, even at this hour, realize the situation in which I found myself. I cannot recall the astounding incident thoroughly. Imagination in vain tries to compass the awful paradox.

It breathed. I felt its warm breath upon my cheek. It struggled fiercely. It had hands. They clutched me. Its skin was smooth, like my own. There it lay, pressed close up against me, solid as stone,—and yet utterly invisible!

I wonder that I did not faint or go mad on the instant. Some wonderful instinct must have sustained me; for, absolutely, in place of loosening my hold on the terrible Enigma, I seemed to gain an additional strength in my moment of horror, and tightened my grasp with such wonderful force that I felt the creature shivering with agony. 26

Just then Hammond entered my room at the head of the household. As soon as he beheld my face—which, I suppose, must have been an awful sight to look at—he hastened forward, crying, “Great heaven, Harry! what has happened?” 27

“Hammond! Hammond!” I cried, “come here. Oh! this is awful! I have been attacked in bed by something or other, which I have hold of; but I can’t see it—I can’t see it!” 28

Hammond, doubtless struck by the unfeigned horror expressed in my countenance, made one or two steps forward with an anxious yet puzzled expression. A very audible titter burst from the remainder of my visitors. This suppressed laughter made me furious. To laugh at a human being in my position! It was the worst species of cruelty. *Now*, I can understand why the appearance of a man struggling violently, as it would seem, with an airy nothing, and calling for assistance against a vision, should have appeared ludicrous. *Then*, so great was my rage against the mocking crowd that had I the power I would have stricken them dead where they stood. 29

“Hammond! Hammond!” I cried again, despairingly, “for God’s sake come to me. I can hold the—the Thing but a short while longer. It is overpowering me. Help me! Help me!” 30

“Harry,” whispered Hammond, approaching me, “you have been smoking too much.” 31

“I swear to you, Hammond, that this is no vision,” I answered, in the same low tone. “Don’t you see how it shakes my whole frame with its struggles? If you don’t believe me, convince yourself. Feel it,—touch it.” 32

Hammond advanced and laid his hand on the spot I indicated. A wild cry of horror burst from him. He had felt it! 33

In a moment he had discovered somewhere in my room a long piece of cord, and was the next instant winding it and knotting it about the body of the unseen being that I clasped in my arms. 34

“Harry,” he said, in a hoarse, agitated voice, for, though he preserved his presence of mind, he was deeply moved, “Harry, it’s all safe now. You may let go, old fellow, if you’re tired. The Thing can’t move.” 35

I was utterly exhausted, and I gladly loosed my hold. 36

Hammond stood holding the ends of the cord that bound the Invisible, twisted round his hand, while before him, self-supporting as it were, he beheld a rope laced and interlaced, and stretching tightly round a vacant space. I never saw a man look so thoroughly stricken with awe. Nevertheless his face expressed all the courage and determination which I knew him to possess. His lips, although white, were set firmly, and one could perceive at a glance that, although stricken with fear, he was not daunted. 37

The confusion that ensued among the guests of the house who were witnesses of this extraordinary scene between Hammond and myself,—who beheld the pantomime of binding this struggling Something,—who beheld me almost sinking from physical exhaustion when my task of jailer was over—the confusion and terror that took possession of the bystanders, when they saw all this, was beyond description. The weaker ones fled from the apartment. The few who remained clustered near the door, and could not be induced to approach Hammond and his Charge. Still incredulity broke out through their terror. They had not the courage to satisfy themselves, and yet they doubted. It was in vain that I begged of some of the men to come near and convince themselves by touch of the existence in that room of a living being which was invisible. They were incredulous, but did not dare to undeceive themselves. How could a solid, living, breathing body be invisible, they asked. My reply was this. I gave a sign to Hammond, and both of us—conquering our fearful repugnance to touch the invisible creature—lifted it from the ground, manacled as it was, and took it to my bed. Its weight was about that of a boy of 38



fourteen.

"Now, my friends," I said, as Hammond and myself held the creature suspended over the bed, "I can give you self-evident proof that here is a solid, ponderable body which, nevertheless, you cannot see. Be good enough to watch the surface of the bed attentively."

I was astonished at my own courage in treating this strange event so calmly; but I had recovered from my first terror, and felt a sort of scientific pride in the affair which dominated every other feeling.

The eyes of the bystanders were immediately fixed on my bed. At a given signal Hammond and I let the creature fall. There was the dull sound of a heavy body alighting on a soft mass. The timbers of the bed creaked. A deep impression marked itself distinctly on the pillow, and on the bed itself. The crowd who witnessed this gave a sort of low, universal cry, and rushed from the room. Hammond and I were left alone with our Mystery.

We remained silent for some time, listening to the low, irregular breathing of the creature on the bed, and watching the rustle of the bedclothes as it impotently struggled to free itself from confinement. Then Hammond spoke.

"Harry, this is awful."

"Aye, awful."

"But not unaccountable."

"Not unaccountable! What do you mean? Such a thing has never occurred since the birth of the world. I know not what to think, Hammond. God grant that I am not mad, and that this is not an insane fantasy!"

"Let us reason a little, Harry. Here is a solid body which we touch, but which we cannot see. The fact is so unusual that it strikes us with terror. Is there no parallel, though, for such a phenomenon? Take a piece of pure glass. It is tangible and transparent. A certain chemical coarseness is all that prevents its being so entirely transparent as to be totally invisible. It is not *theoretically impossible*, mind you, to make a glass which shall not reflect a single ray of light—a glass so pure and homogeneous in its atoms that the rays from the sun shall pass through it as they do through the air, refracted but not reflected. We do not see the air, and yet we feel it."

"That's all very well, Hammond, but these are inanimate substances. Glass does not breathe, air does not breathe. *This* thing has a heart that palpitates,—a will that moves it,—lungs that play, and inspire and respire."

"You forget the strange phenomena of which we have so often heard of late," answered the Doctor, gravely. "At the meetings called 'spirit circles,' invisible hands have been thrust into the hands of those persons round the table—warm, fleshly hands that seemed to pulsate with mortal life."

"What? Do you think, then, that this thing is—"

"I don't know what it is," was the solemn reply; "but please the gods I will, with your assistance, thoroughly investigate it."

We watched together, smoking many pipes, all night long, by the bedside of the unearthly being that tossed and panted until it was apparently wearied out. Then we learned by the low, regular breathing that it slept.

The next morning the house was all astir. The boarders congregated on the landing outside my room, and Hammond and myself were lions. We had to answer a thousand questions as to the state of our extraordinary prisoner, for as yet not one person in the house except ourselves could be induced to set foot in the apartment.

The creature was awake. This was evidenced by the convulsive manner in which the bedclothes were moved in its efforts to escape. There was something truly terrible in beholding, as it were, those second-hand indications of the terrible writhings and agonized struggles for liberty which themselves were invisible.

Hammond and myself had racked our brains during the long night to discover some means by which we might realize the shape and general appearance of the Enigma. As well as we could make out by passing our hands over the creature's form, its outlines and lineaments were human. There was a mouth; a round, smooth head without hair; a nose, which, however, was little elevated above the cheeks; and its hands and feet felt like those of a boy. At first we thought of placing the being on a smooth surface and tracing its outline with chalk, as shoemakers trace the outline of the foot. This plan was given up as being of no value. Such an outline would give not the slightest idea of its conformation.

A happy thought struck me. We would take a cast of it in plaster of Paris. This would give us the solid figure, and satisfy all our wishes. But how to do it? The movements of the creature would disturb the setting of the plastic covering, and distort the mold. Another thought. Why not give it chloroform? It had respiratory organs—that was evident by its breathing. Once reduced to a state of insensibility, we could do with it what we would. Doctor X— was sent for; and after the worthy physician had recovered from the first shock of amazement, he proceeded to administer the chloroform. In three minutes afterward we were enabled to remove the fetters from the creature's body, and a well-known modeler of this city was busily engaged in covering the invisible form with the moist clay. In five minutes more we had a mold, and before evening a rough *fac simile* of the mystery. It was shaped like a man,—distorted, uncouth, and horrible, but still a man. It was small, not over four feet and some inches in height, and its limbs revealed a muscular development that was unparalleled. Its face surpassed in hideousness anything I had ever seen. Gustave Doré, or Callot, or Tony Johannot, never conceived anything so horrible. There is a face in one of the latter's illustrations to "Un Voyage où il vous plaira," which somewhat approaches the countenance of this creature, but does not equal it. It was the physiognomy of what I should have fancied a ghoul to be. It looked as if it was capable of feeding on human flesh.

Having satisfied our curiosity, and bound every one in the house to secrecy, it became a question what was to be done with our Enigma. It was impossible that we should keep such a horror in our house; it was equally impossible that such an awful being should be let loose upon the world. I confess that I would have gladly voted for the creature's destruction. But who would shoulder the responsibility? Who would undertake the execution of this horrible semblance of a human being? Day after day this question was deliberated gravely. The boarders all left the house. Mrs. Moffat was in despair, and threatened Hammond and myself with all sorts of legal penalties if we did not remove the Horror. Our answer was, "We will go if you like, but we decline taking this creature with us. Remove it yourself if you please. It appeared in your house. On you the responsibility rests." To this there was, of course, no answer. Mrs. Moffat could not obtain for love or money a person who would even approach the Mystery.

The most singular part of the transaction was that we were entirely ignorant of what the creature habitually fed on. Everything in the way of nutriment that we could think of was placed before it, but was never touched. It was awful to stand by, day after day, and see the clothes toss, and hear the hard breathing, and know that it was starving.


Ten, twelve days, a fortnight passed, and it still lived. The pulsations of the heart, however, were daily growing fainter, and had now nearly ceased altogether. It was evident that the creature was dying for want of sustenance. While this terrible life struggle was going on, I felt miserable. I could not sleep of nights. Horrible as the creature was, it was pitiful to think of the pangs it was suffering.

At last it died. Hammond and I found it cold and stiff one morning in the bed. The heart had ceased to beat, the lungs to inspire. We hastened to bury it in the garden. It was a strange funeral, the dropping of that viewless corpse into the damp hole. The cast of its form I gave to Dr. X—, who keeps it in his museum in Tenth Street.



As I am on the eve of a long journey from which I may not return, I have drawn up this narrative of an event the most singular that has ever come to my knowledge. <sup>61</sup>

NOTE.—It was rumored that the proprietors of a well-known museum in this city had made arrangements with Dr. X— — to exhibit to the public the singular cast which Mr. Escott deposited with him. So extraordinary a history cannot fail to attract universal attention. <sup>62</sup>

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Gothic Excess and Transgression

The language of terror is dedicated to an endless expense, even though it only seeks to achieve a single effect. It drives itself out of any possible resting place.

Sade and the novels of terror introduce an essential imbalance within works of language: they force them of necessity to be always excessive and deficient.

(Michel Foucault, 'Language to Infinity', p. 65)

### EXCESS

- Gothic signifies a writing of excess. It appears in the awful obscurity that haunted eighteenth-century rationality and morality. It shadows the despairing ecstasies of Romantic idealism and individualism and the uncanny dualities of Victorian realism and decadence. Gothic atmospheres – gloomy and mysterious – have repeatedly signalled the disturbing return of pasts upon presents and evoked emotions of terror and laughter. In the twentieth century, in diverse and ambiguous ways, Gothic figures

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have continued to shadow the progress of modernity with counter-narratives displaying the underside of enlightenment and humanist values. Gothic condenses the many perceived threats to these values, threats associated with supernatural and natural forces, imaginative excesses and delusions, religious and human evil, social transgression, mental disintegration and spiritual corruption. If not a purely negative term, Gothic writing remains fascinated by objects and practices that are constructed as negative, irrational, immoral and fantastic. In a world which, since the eighteenth century, has become increasingly secular, the absence of a fixed religious framework as well as changing social and political conditions has meant that Gothic writing, and its reception, has undergone significant transformations. Gothic excesses, none the less, the fascination with transgression and the anxiety over cultural limits and boundaries, continue to produce ambivalent emotions and meanings in their tales of darkness, desire and power.

In Gothic fiction certain stock features provide the principal embodiments and evocations of cultural anxieties. Tortuous, fragmented narratives relating mysterious incidents, horrible images and life-threatening pursuits predominate in the eighteenth century. Spectres, monsters, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monks and nuns, fainting heroines and bandits populate Gothic landscapes as suggestive figures of imagined and realistic threats. This list grew, in the nineteenth century, with the addition of scientists, fathers, husbands, madmen, criminals and the monstrous double signifying duplicity and evil nature. Gothic landscapes are desolate, alienating and full of menace. In the eighteenth century they were wild and mountainous locations. Later the modern city combined the natural and architectural components of Gothic grandeur and wildness, its dark, labyrinthine streets suggesting the violence and menace of Gothic castle and forest.

The major locus of Gothic plots, the castle, was gloomily predominant in early Gothic fiction. Decaying, bleak and full of hidden passageways, the castle was linked to other medieval

edifices – abbeys, churches and graveyards especially – that, in their generally ruinous states, harked back to a feudal past associated with barbarity, superstition and fear. Architecture, particularly medieval in form (although historical accuracy was not a prime concern), signalled the spatial and temporal separation of the past and its values from those of the present. The pleasures of horror and terror came from the reappearance of figures long gone. None the less, Gothic narratives never escaped the concerns of their own times, despite the heavy historical trappings. In later fiction, the castle gradually gave way to the old house: as both building and family line, it became the site where fears and anxieties returned in the present. These anxieties varied according to diverse changes: political revolution, industrialisation, urbanisation, shifts in sexual and domestic organisation, and scientific discovery.

In Gothic productions imagination and emotional effects exceed reason. Passion, excitement and sensation transgress social proprieties and moral laws. Ambivalence and uncertainty obscure single meaning. Drawing on the myths, legends and folklore of medieval romances, Gothic conjured up magical worlds and tales of knights, monsters, ghosts and extravagant adventures and terrors. Associated with wildness, Gothic signified an over-abundance of imaginative frenzy, untamed by reason and unrestrained by conventional eighteenth-century demands for simplicity, realism or probability. The boundlessness as well as the over-ornamentation of Gothic styles were part of a move away from strictly neoclassical aesthetic rules which insisted on clarity and symmetry, on variety encompassed by unity of purpose and design. Gothic signified a trend towards an aesthetics based on feeling and emotion and associated primarily with the sublime.

Throughout the eighteenth century the sublime constituted a major area of debate among writers and theorists of taste. In contrast to beauty, the proportioned contours of which could be taken in by the eye of the beholder, the sublime was associated with grandeur and magnificence. Craggy, mountainous landscapes, the

Alps in particular, stimulated powerful emotions of terror and wonder in the viewer. Their immense scale offered a glimpse of infinity and awful power, intimations of a metaphysical force beyond rational knowledge and human comprehension. In the expansive domain opened up by the sublime all sorts of imaginative objects and fears situated in or beyond nature could proliferate in a marvellous profusion of the supernatural and the ridiculous, the magical and the nightmarish, the fantastic and the absurd.

Linked to poetic and visionary power, the sublime also evoked excessive emotion. Through its presentations of supernatural, sensational and terrifying incidents, imagined or not, Gothic produced emotional effects on its readers rather than developing a rational or properly cultivated response. Exciting rather than informing, it chilled their blood, delighted their superstitious fancies and fed uncultivated appetites for marvellous and strange events, instead of instructing readers with moral lessons that inculcated decent and tasteful attitudes to literature and life. Gothic excesses transgressed the proper limits of aesthetic as well as social order in the overflow of emotions that undermined boundaries of life and fiction, fantasy and reality. Attacked throughout the second half of the eighteenth century for encouraging excessive emotions and invigorating unlicensed passions, Gothic texts were also seen to be subverting the mores and manners on which good social behaviour rested. The feminisation of reading practices and markets, linked to concerns about romances throughout the century, were seen to upset domestic sensibilities as well as sexual propriety. Presenting pasts that the eighteenth century constructed as barbarous or uncivilised, Gothic fictions seemed to promote vice and violence, giving free reign to selfish ambitions and sexual desires beyond the prescriptions of law or familial duty. By nefarious means Gothic villains usurp rightful heirs, rob reputable families of property and reputation while threatening the honour of their wives and orphaned daughters. Illegitimate power and violence is not only put on display but threatens to consume the

world of civilised and domestic values. In the skeletons that leap from family closets and the erotic and often incestuous tendencies of Gothic villains there emerges the awful spectre of complete social disintegration in which virtue cedes to vice, reason to desire, law to tyranny.

Uncertainties about the nature of power, law, society, family and sexuality dominate Gothic fiction. They are linked to wider threats of disintegration manifested most forcefully in political revolution. The decade of the French Revolution was also the period when the Gothic novel was at its most popular. Gothic, too, was a term invoked in many political debates, signifying, for a range of political positions, revolutionary mobs, enlightened radicals and irrational adherence to tyrannical and superstitious feudal values. In a more specific historical sense, Gothic was associated with the history of the northern, Germanic nations whose fierce avowal of the values of freedom and democracy was claimed as an ancient heritage. Opposed to all forms of tyranny and slavery, the warlike, Gothic tribes of northern Europe were popularly believed to have brought down the Roman empire. Roman tyranny was subsequently identified with the Catholic Church, and the production of Gothic novels in northern European Protestant countries often had an anti-Catholic subtext.

The excesses of political meaning display the ambivalence of Gothic. In the figures and settings that dominate Gothic narratives this ambivalence is manifested in terms of the genre's affiliations with class. Old castles, knights and malevolent aristocrats seem to fit into an enlightenment pattern identifying all things Gothic with the tyranny and barbarity of feudal times. Rational distancing and disavowal of past forms of power, however, is belied by the continued fascination with the architecture, customs and values of the Middle Ages: Gothic novels seem to sustain a nostalgic relish for a lost era of romance and adventure, for a world that, if barbaric, was, from the perspective of the late eighteenth century, also ordered. In this respect Gothic fiction preserves older traditions



rather than attacking the aristocratic legacy of feudalism. Yet narratives are dominated by values of family, domesticity and virtuous sentimentalism, values more appropriate to the middle-class readership that composed the increasingly large portion of the literary market in the eighteenth century. Aristocratic trappings of chivalry and romance are subsumed by bourgeois values of virtue, merit, propriety and, within reason, individualism. The anxieties about the past and its forms of power are projected on to malevolent and villainous aristocrats in order to consolidate the ascendancy of middle-class values. In nineteenth-century Gothic fiction the trappings of aristocracy, the castles and counts, give way to narratives whose action centres on urban, domestic, commercial and professional figures and locales. Aristocratic excess, though still in evidence, is generally replaced by other forms of threat.

### TRANSGRESSION

The excesses and ambivalence associated with Gothic figures were seen as distinct signs of transgression. Aesthetically excessive, Gothic productions were considered unnatural in their undermining of physical laws with marvellous beings and fantastic events. Transgressing the bounds of reality and possibility, they also challenged reason through their overindulgence in fanciful ideas and imaginative flights. Encouraging superstitious beliefs Gothic narratives subverted rational codes of understanding and, in their presentation of diabolical deeds and supernatural incidents, ventured into the unhallowed ground of necromancy and arcane ritual. The centrality of usurpation, intrigue, betrayal and murder to Gothic plots appeared to celebrate criminal behaviour, violent executions of selfish ambition and voracious passion and licentious enactments of carnal desire. Such terrors, emerging from the gloom of a castle or lurking in the dark features of the villain, were also the source of pleasure, stimulating excitements which blurred definitions of reason and morality and, critics

feared, encouraging readers' decline into depravity and corruption. As well as recasting the nature of social and domestic fears, Gothic fictions presented different, more exciting, worlds in which heroines in particular could encounter not only frightening violence but also adventurous freedom. The artificiality of narratives imagined other worlds and also challenged the forms of nature and reality advocated by eighteenth-century social and domestic ideology.

Transgression, like excess, is not simply or lightly undertaken in Gothic fiction, but ambivalent in its aims and effects. Not only a way of producing excessive emotion, a celebration of transgression for its own sake, Gothic terrors activate a sense of the unknown and project an uncontrollable and overwhelming power which threatens not only the loss of sanity, honour, property or social standing but the very order which supports and is regulated by the coherence of those terms. The terrors and horrors of transgression in Gothic writing become a powerful means to reassert the values of society, virtue and propriety: transgression, by crossing the social and aesthetic limits, serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity, restoring or defining limits. Gothic novels frequently adopt this cautionary strategy, warning of dangers of social and moral transgression by presenting them in their darkest and most threatening form. The tortuous tales of vice, corruption and depravity are sensational examples of what happens when the rules of social behaviour are neglected. Gothic terrors and horrors emanate from readers' identifications with heroes and heroines: after escaping the monsters and penetrating the forest, subterranean or narrative labyrinths of the Gothic nightmare, heroines and readers manage to return with an elevated sense of identity to the solid realities of justice, morality and social order. In political texts of the 1790s like Burke's *Reflections* the construction of revolutionary excesses as a terrifying monster served to define the threat and thus contain and legitimate its exclusion. Terror evoked cathartic emotions and facilitated the expulsion of the object of

fear. Transgression, provoking fears of social disintegration, thus enabled the reconstitution of limits and boundaries. Good was affirmed in the contrast with evil; light and reason won out over darkness and superstition. Antitheses, made visible in Gothic transgressions, allowed proper limits and values to be asserted at the closure of narratives in which mysteries were explained or moral resolutions advanced. In an age that developed philosophical, scientific and psychological systems to define and classify the nature of the external world, the parameters of human organisation and their relation to the workings of the mind, transgression is important not only as an interrogation of received rules and values, but in the identification, reconstitution or transformation of limits. In this respect Gothic fiction is less an unrestrained celebration of unsanctioned excesses and more an examination of the limits produced in the eighteenth century to distinguish good from evil, reason from passion, virtue from vice and self from other. Images of light and dark focus, in their duality, the acceptable and unacceptable sides of the limits that regulate social distinctions.

In the demonstrations of the forms and effects of evil by means of terror, the line between transgression and a restitution of acceptable limits remained a difficult one to discern. Some moral endings are little more than perfunctory tokens, thin excuses for salacious excesses, while others sustain a decorous and didactic balance of excitement and instruction. The moral, political and literary ambivalence of Gothic fiction seems to be an effect of the counter-vailing movements of propriety and imaginative excess in which morality, in its enthusiasm to identify and exclude forms of evil, of culturally threatening elements, becomes entangled in the symbolic and social antagonisms it sets out to distinguish. Defining and affirming one term – reason – by denigrating and excluding the other – passion – moral and literary value admitted both force and emotion as a means of regulating conventional hierarchies. These contradictions undermine the project of

attaining and fixing secure boundaries and leave Gothic texts open to a play of ambivalence, a dynamic of limit and transgression that both restores and contests boundaries. This play of terms, of oppositions, indeed, characterises the ambivalence of Gothic fiction: good depends on evil, light on dark, reason on irrationality, in order to define limits. The play means that Gothic is an inscription neither of darkness nor of light, a delineation neither of reason and morality nor of superstition and corruption, neither good nor evil, but both at the same time. Relations between real and fantastic, sacred and profane, supernatural and natural, past and present, civilised and barbaric, rational and fanciful, remain crucial to the Gothic dynamic of limit and transgression.

The play of antitheses produces the ambivalent and excessive effects and reception of Gothic writing. Drawing on various literary forms, Gothic fiction hovers between the categories of novel and romance. Considered as a serious threat to literary and social values, anything Gothic was also discarded as an idle waste of time. Its images of dark power and mystery evoked fear and anxiety, but their absurdity also provoked ridicule and laughter. The emotions most associated with Gothic fiction are similarly ambivalent: objects of terror and horror not only provoke repugnance, disgust and recoil, but also engage readers' interest, fascinating and attracting them. Threats are spiced with thrills, terrors with delights, horrors with pleasures. Terror, in its sublime manifestations, is associated with subjective elevation, with the pleasures of imaginatively transcending or overcoming fear and thereby renewing and heightening a sense of self and social value: threatened with dissolution, the self, like the social limits which define it, reconstitutes its identity against the otherness and loss presented in the moment of terror. The subjective elevation in moments of terror is thus exciting and pleasurable, uplifting the self by means of emotional expenditure that simultaneously excludes the object of fear. In the process, fear and its darkly obscure object is externalised and limits are reconstituted between



inside and outside. While terror and horror are often used synonymously, distinctions can be made between them as countervailing aspects of Gothic's emotional ambivalence. If terror leads to an imaginative expansion of one's sense of self, horror describes the movement of contraction and recoil. Like the dilation of the pupil in moments of excitement and fear, terror marks the uplifting thrill where horror distinguishes a contraction at the imminence and unavoidability of the threat. Terror expels after horror glimpses invasion, reconstituting the boundaries that horror has seen dissolve.

The movement between terror and horror is part of a dynamic whose poles chart the extent and different directions of Gothic projects. These poles, always inextricably linked, involve the externalisation or internalisation of objects of fear and anxiety. The different movements implied by terror and horror characterise the most important shift in the genre. In the eighteenth century the emphasis was placed on expelling and objectifying threatening figures of darkness and evil, casting them out and restoring proper limits: villains are punished; heroines well married. In the nineteenth century, the security and stability of social, political and aesthetic formations are much more uncertain. In the changing political and philosophical conditions attendant on the French Revolution all hierarchies and distinctions governing social and economic formations were in question. Gothic castles, villains and ghosts, already made clichéd and formulaic by popular imitation, ceased to evoke terror or horror. Their capacity to embody and externalise fears and anxieties was in decline. If they remained, they continued more as signs of internal states and conflicts than of external threats. The new concern inflected in Gothic forms emerged as the darker side to Romantic ideals of individuality, imaginative consciousness and creation. Gothic became part of an internalised world of guilt, anxiety, despair, a world of individual transgression interrogating the uncertain bounds of imaginative freedom and human knowledge. Romantic ideals were shadowed

by Gothic passions and extravagance. External forms were signs of psychological disturbance, of increasingly uncertain subjective states dominated by fantasy, hallucination and madness. The internalisation of Gothic forms reflected wider anxieties which, centring on the individual, concerned the nature of reality and society and its relation to individual freedom and imagination. Terror became secondary to horror, the sublime ceded to the uncanny, the latter an effect of uncertainty, of the irruption of fantasies, suppressed wishes and emotional and sexual conflicts. A disruptive return of archaic desires and fears, the uncanny disturbs the familiar, homely and secure sense of reality and normality. The disturbance of psychic states, however, does not signal a purely subjective disintegration: the uncanny renders all boundaries uncertain and, in nineteenth-century Gothic writing, often leaves readers unsure whether narratives describe psychological disturbance or wider upheavals within formations of reality and normality.

Less identifiable as a separate genre in the nineteenth century, Gothic fiction seemed to go underground: its depths were less romantic chasms or labyrinthine dungeons, than the murky recesses of human subjectivity. The city, a gloomy forest or dark labyrinth itself, became a site of nocturnal corruption and violence, a locus of real horror; the family became a place rendered threatening and uncanny by the haunting return of past transgressions and attendant guilt on an everyday world shrouded in strangeness. The attempt to distinguish the apparent from the real, the good from the bad, evident in the standard Gothic device of portraits assuming life, was internalised rather than explained as a supernatural occurrence, a trick of the light or of the imagination. Uncanny effects rather than sublime terrors predominated. Doubles, *alter egos*, mirrors and animated representations of the disturbing parts of human identity became the stock devices. Signifying the alienation of the human subject from the culture and language in which s/he was located, these devices increasingly

destabilised the boundaries between psyche and reality, opening up an indeterminate zone in which the differences between fantasy and actuality were no longer secure.

The Gothic strain existed in excess of, and often within, realist forms, both inhabiting and excluded from its homogenising representations of the world. Psychological rather than supernatural forces became the prime movers in worlds where individuals could be sure neither of others nor of themselves. As bourgeois modes of social organisation and economic and aesthetic production demanded increasing realism, self-discipline and regulation of its individuals, with techniques being developed by social and scientific practices, those persons that deviated from its norms became fascinating objects of scrutiny. Gothic subjects were alienated, divided from themselves, no longer in control of those passions, desires, and fantasies, that had been policed and partially expunged in the eighteenth century. Individuals were divided products of both reason and desire, subjects of obsession, narcissism and self-gratification as much as reasonable, responsible codes of behaviour. Nature, wild and untameable, was as much within as without. Excess emanated from within, from hidden, pathological motivations that rationality was powerless to control. Scientific theory and technological innovation, often used as figures of human alienation and Gothic excess themselves, provided a vocabulary and objects of fear and anxiety for nineteenth-century Gothic writing. Darwinian models of evolution, researches in criminology, anatomical and physiological science identified the bestial within the human. Categorised forms of deviance and abnormality explained criminal behaviour as a pathological return of animalistic, instinctual habits. The forms of history deployed, appearing like ghosts in the present, were less feudal and romantic and more an effect of scientific discourse: guilts and fears haunted individuals and families, while primal patterns of instinct and motivation threatened the humanity of the human species. Science, with its chemical concoctions, mechanical laboratories

and electrical instruments became a new domain for the encounter with dark powers, now secular, mental and animal rather than supernatural. Crime similarly presented a challenge to rationality in a degenerate world of mysterious but distinctly human and corrupt motivations. In defining a divided world of divided beings, science also disclosed a sense of loss, of the decline of human society and its values of individual strength and health. Faced with this loss, presented as social degeneration, criminal and sexual degradation, science gave way to a new spirituality which tried to recover a sense of cultural value and unity by inflecting science with sacred, religious powers, powers that invoked conventional Gothic figures and strategies.

## DIFFUSION

Many of the anxieties articulated in Gothic terms in the nineteenth century reappear in the twentieth century. Their appearance, however, is more diverse, a diffusion of Gothic traces among a multiplicity of different genres and media. Science fiction, the adventure novel, modernist literature, romantic fiction and popular horror writing often resonate with Gothic motifs that have been transformed and displaced by different cultural anxieties. Terror and horror are diversely located in alienating bureaucratic and technological reality, in psychiatric hospitals and criminal subcultures, in scientific, future and intergalactic worlds, in fantasy and the occult. Threatening figures of menace, destruction and violence emerge in the form of mad scientists, psychopaths, extraterrestrials and a host of strange supernatural or naturally monstrous mutations.

One place, however, has perpetuated distinctly Gothic figures: the cinema. From the 1930s vampires, Jekylls and Hydes, Franksteins and monsters have populated cinema and television screens in a variety of guises ranging from the seriously sinister to the comic and ridiculous. Their popularity, as well as the way they



ambivalently reflect cultural anxieties, locates them firmly in the non-literary, cultural, tradition that conventionally remains the true locus of Gothic.

On the screen as well as in certain novels, Gothic narratives display a more serious 'literary' or self-conscious aspect. In this respect they echo the concerns about narrative that are embedded in Gothic writing from its beginnings, concerns about the limits, effects and power of representation in the formation of identities, realities and institutions. Gothic devices are all signs of the superficiality, deception and duplicity of narratives and verbal or visual images. In a century that has become increasingly sceptical about the values and practices associated with modernity and perceives these values as powerful fictions or grand narratives, new and yet familiar terrors and horrors emerge to present the dissolution of all order, meaning and identity in a play of signs, images and texts. One of the principal horrors lurking throughout Gothic fiction is the sense that there is no exit from the darkly illuminating labyrinth of language.

The diffusion of Gothic forms and figures over more than two centuries makes the definition of a homogeneous generic category exceptionally difficult. Changing features, emphases and meanings disclose Gothic writing as a mode that exceeds genre and categories, restricted neither to a literary school nor to a historical period. The diffusion of Gothic features across texts and historical periods distinguishes the Gothic as a hybrid form, incorporating and transforming other literary forms as well as developing and changing its own conventions in relation to newer modes of writing. In many ways the multiple origins of Gothic writing highlight its diverse composition. While certain devices and plots, what might be called the staples of the Gothic, are clearly identifiable in early Gothic texts, the tradition draws on medieval romances, supernatural, Faustian and fairy tales, Renaissance drama, sentimental, picaresque and confessional narratives as well as the ruins, tombs and nocturnal speculations that fascinated Graveyard poets.

Apart from the period in which the key Gothic texts were produced, a period extending from Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), it is impossible to define a fixed set of conventions. Even these dates seem arbitrary, straddling as they do the eras dominated by neoclassical and Romantic writing. Gothic forms, moreover, are not only shaped by literatures of the past: the styles prevailing in the respective presents in which they were produced also provide their specific shape. Nowhere is this more evident than in the shifts that occurred within Gothic writing in the move from a neoclassical to a Romantic context, and in the various, and differently marked, descriptions of texts as novels, romances or tales. Gothic writing emerges and takes shape in relation to dominant literary practices, a relationship that is as much antithetical as imitative. In the changes of Gothic sites of terror and horror in the nineteenth century, uncanny shadows were cast on the privileged loci of realism.

Existing in relation to other forms of writing, Gothic texts have generally been marginalised, excluded from the sphere of acceptable literature. Their popularity within an expanding readership in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as novels borrowed a volume at a time from circulating libraries or in the form of stories in the periodical magazines that indulged the appetite for tales of terror or as burlesques and melodramas produced for the stage, was a clear sign of their tastelessness and vulgarity. In the realm of popular culture, however, Gothic writing thrived and exerted an influence on more properly literary forms. From the high cultural position associated with Literature, Gothic not only signified popular fiction but remained a darker undercurrent to the literary tradition itself. That tradition, however, distinguishing itself and its canon of great works according to different codes and values in specific periods, remains discontinuous and partial. What might, loosely, be called the Gothic tradition, is no less partial and fragmented. It possesses, however, a broad, if strange, continuity in

the way it draws inspiration, plots and techniques from medieval romances and poetry, from ballads and folklore, from Renaissance writing, especially Shakespearean drama and Spenserian poetry, as well as from various seventeenth- and eighteenth-century prose forms. Articulating different, popular and often marginalised forms of writing in periods and genres privileged as Romanticism, Realism and Modernism, Gothic writing emerges as the thread that defines British literature. In the United States, where the literary canon is composed of works in which the influence of romances and Gothic novels is far more overt, literature again seems virtually an effect of a Gothic tradition. Gothic can perhaps be called the only true literary tradition. Or its stain.

This introductory volume examines the distinctive features, particular types and significant transformations of the genre. It looks at Gothic's relation to other genres by selecting key texts from the diverse range of material from the eighteenth century to the present. The amount of material, given not only the number and variety of texts but their different textual and cultural conditions of production, has necessitated certain omissions in order that particular examples of Gothic writing can be located and analysed in specific contexts. The focus is primarily on Gothic writing in English: there are no discussions of Russian texts, nor of French productions, despite the Gothic elements that appear in some symbolist and surrealist work. In part this is because lines of connection are difficult to trace: the surrealist interest in Gothic texts is indirect, appearing to stem from a deeper fascination with the work of the Marquis de Sade who, in his 'Reflections on the Novel', praised Mrs Radcliffe's and M. G. Lewis's narratives. German tales, given the widespread popular association of Gothic with all things gloomy and Germanic, receive only brief attention in references to the influence of German Romanticism, particularly of E. T. A. Hoffman and Ludwig Tieck, on British and American writing. Focusing on particular texts as representative of Gothic developments in the

eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the discussions of Gothic texts analyse the generic diffusion of Gothic forms, especially in the twentieth century. Moreover, addressing recent or postmodern texts in the light of Gothic features presents uncanny parallels between the 1790s, 1890s and 1990s and facilitates a rereading of the narratives of modernity.

## CRITICISM

The approach of this book has been made possible by recent developments and re-examinations in literary, critical and cultural theory. This is not to say, however, that earlier scholarship and critical enthusiasm for Gothic writing has been neglected, far from it. While work of this kind sustained serious interest in forms marginalised, if not forgotten, by canons as curiosities in the history of literary production and consumption, the shift in values and perspectives provided by recent theories has significantly altered attitudes to Gothic texts. By challenging the hierarchies of literary value and widening the horizons of critical study to include other forms of writing and address different cultural and historical issues, recent critical practices have moved Gothic texts from previously marginalised sites designated as popular fiction or literary eccentricity. The questioning of boundaries in recent criticism is highly appropriate to studies of Gothic texts.

This introductory volume draws on the different issues and perspectives informing and structuring critical interpretations and reinterpretations: it is an effect of previous writing, a selective composite of various critical readings which, while referring to no specific critical statement other than those by contemporary reviewers, remains indebted to the history of Gothic criticism. The most informative work on different aspects of Gothic writing and using different approaches is cited in the bibliography.

The following overview will indicate the variety of ways criticism has engaged with Gothic writing, engagements that are clearly



affected by changing critical positions. In the early part of the twentieth century, from the 1920s, Gothic writing was discussed as a subgenre, of peripheral interest as part of general literary historical surveys discussing the development of the novel. Michael Sadleir's interest was a result of the list of 'horrid' novels cited in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818). In J. M. S. Tompkins's study of the popular novel various themes and characteristics of Gothic were situated within a general literary historical context, while Edith Birkhead examined particular tales more closely in terms of their literary merit. More favourable accounts of Gothic novels were offered in Montague Summers's, and subsequently Devendra Varma's, critical histories. The appeal, for them, of Gothic writing lay in its opposition to realism and rationalism, in its quest for a realm beyond the empirical and material world, for a realm of the mysterious, mystical and holy. For them, terror and horror are linked to awe and dread as ways of representing a human quest for metaphysical, religious experience in a secular age. While, in *The Gothic Quest* (1938), Summers traced Gothic influences into the twentieth century, it is in examining the classical Gothic texts and in Romanticism that his work holds most interest. He initiated attempts at classifying different Gothic texts. Categories of 'supernatural-', 'historical-', 'rational-' and 'terror-Gothic' have, since Summers, been amended in Varma's work, in G. R. Thompson's collections, and in Robert Hume's and Robert Platzner's debate, in order to account for different Gothic features and effects, especially that of horror.

Much of this critical work focuses on the relation between Gothic and Romantic writing. Broader definitions of Romanticism, like those by Eino Railo and Mario Praz, include Gothic writings, but as examples of less ideal themes of violence, incest, passion and agony: Gothic becomes the dark or negative side to Romanticism. In the contrasts displayed in Gothic presentations of darker themes, criticism finds an explicit invitation to indulge in traditional psychoanalysis: Gothic becomes a fiction of unconscious

desire, a release of repressed energies and antisocial fantasies. Themes of the divided nature of the human constitution have become established ways of discussing Gothic texts: dualities of mind and body, reason and desire, are repeatedly invoked. Popular Freudianism, assimilated by nineteenth-century notions of human duality, is ubiquitous, informing texts like Robert Kiely's and Masao Miyoshi's on the romantic novel and the divided self.

David Punter's exhaustive survey of Gothic literature is similarly Freudian, though heavily tempered by Marxist criticism. Punter's analysis, like Franco Moretti's accounts of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, focuses on issues of class by relating Gothic texts to anxieties about aristocratic and bourgeois power, as well as the fears about the monstrous proletariat and forms of alienation. Since de Sade's 'Reflections on the Novel', Gothic has been linked to revolutionary energies, a connection recently examined by Ronald Paulson. With Ellen Moers's notion of 'female Gothic' as a mode of addressing fears about sexuality and childbirth, one of the most significant directions in recent Gothic criticism was laid out. A challenge to, or interrogation of, forms of fiction dominated by patriarchal assumptions, Gothic novels have been reassessed as part of a wider feminist critical movement that recovers suppressed or marginalised writing by women and addresses issues of female experience, sexual oppression and difference.

Extensive interrogations of traditional literary and cultural institutions, related to those enunciated in Marxist and feminist criticism, have emerged in the wake of structuralist theory. Stressing the role of linguistic structures and differences in the formation of cultural meanings, post-structuralist criticisms have attended to relations of textual, sexual and historical production and reproduction. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's book on Gothic conventions disclosed the textuality of the genre, the play of narrative surfaces and metaphors that undermine assumptions of depth and hidden meaning. The link between textuality, power and desire in Gothic fiction has been theorised by Jerrold Hogle, and a recent book,

*Gothic Writing* (1993), by Robert Miles has examined the discursive frameworks enabling the production of earlier Gothic writing. Several critical essays on specific Gothic texts have begun to interpret the genre's relation to notions of identity, sexuality, power and imperialism. Indeed, from the eighteenth century onwards, Gothic texts have been involved in constructing and contesting distinctions between civilisation and barbarism, reason and desire, self and other.

Gothic excesses and transgressions repeatedly return to particular images and particular loci. Familial and sexual relations, power and suppression, turn on the roles and figures of father and daughter. In villains, masculine sovereignty is staged and scrutinised. Old castles, houses and ruins, as in wild landscapes and labyrinthine cities, situate heroines and readers at the limits of normal worlds and mores. Historical events or imagined pasts, also, delineate the boundaries of the normalised present in a movement, an interplay, that leaves neither where they were. In its crossing of boundaries, however, Gothic is a mobile and specific form. For the images and figures that are reiterated constitute a place where cultural fears and fantasies are projected. Thus similar figures have different significances, depending on the culture that uses them. Indeed, this is the pattern of Gothic as a genre that, in generating and refracting diverse objects of fear and anxiety, transforms its own shape and focus. In structuring this book along conventional chronological lines, cultural and historical discontinuities as well as continuities can be plotted, demonstrating the major shifts in Gothic production as well as the persistence of certain patterns. Drawing on newer critical work as well as earlier studies, this introduction anticipates future examinations of the ways Gothic texts produce, reinforce and undermine received ideas about literature, nation, gender and culture.

## Day 2

### Objective

1. Students will be able to define the term “transgression” in relation to the Gothic.

### Materials

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Copies of Botting’s chapter “Gothic Excess and Transgression”

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- Small group discussion
- Large group discussion

### Procedures

1. Write the prompt on the board: “Based on the excerpt that you read for today, what is transgression? Is it a good or bad thing?”
2. Quick-write: students will respond to the prompt on the board. (5 min.)
3. Students will be divided into small groups and will discuss the excerpt, and come up with their own definition of transgression. (25 min.)
4. We will come back together as a class, and groups will share what they discussed. From there we will have a larger discussion of the excerpt. (15 min.)
5. As a class, we will come up with a “universal” definition for the term “transgression.” (5 min.)
6. Assign homework: *Frankenstein* page 3-30.

### Evaluation

1. Through discussion and collaboration, I will evaluate whether or not students are able to define “transgression” in relation to the Gothic.

## Day 3

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to define “horror” and “terror”
2. Students will be able to make predictions about the text.

### Materials

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Copies of *Frankenstein*
- Pen and Paper

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- KWL charts
- Large group discussion

### Procedures

1. Write the journal prompt on the board: “What is the difference between the terms ‘horror’ and ‘terror?’”
2. Quick-write: students respond to the prompt in their journals. (5 min.)
3. As a class, discuss and define the terms “horror” and “terror.” (15 min.)
4. Students will construct and fill out a KWL chart for *Frankenstein*. (15 min.)
5. Have a large class discussion of the beginning of the book. (15 min.)
6. Assign homework: Read Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.”

### Evaluations

1. Through class discussion and collaboration, I will evaluate the students’ ability to develop suitable definitions for “horror” and “terror.”
2. Through collecting the KWL charts and discussion, I will evaluate whether or not students are able to make logical predications about the text.

## Day 4

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to reflect on the keyword “transgression” and apply it to the texts.
2. Students will be able to interpret a scene of “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” through art.

### Materials

- Journals
- Copies of Poe’s “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”
- Paper
- Crayons, Markers, Colored Pencils, etc.

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- Create-a-Sketch activity

### Procedures

1. Students will journal, reflecting on the term “transgression” and how it applies to the overall theme of the unit. (5 minutes)
2. Students will break into their small groups, and choose a moment in Poe’s story that they felt was most important.
3. Each student will then draw an interpretation of that scene, and highlight the things they believe to be most important. (30 minutes)
4. Students will present their drawings to the members of their group, and the group will choose a representative to present the “best” drawing. (5 minutes)
5. The group representatives will share their drawings to the rest of the class, and explain their drawings. (10 minutes)
6. Assign homework: *Frankenstein* pages 31-57.

### Evaluations

1. Through the eventual collection of the journal, I will assess each students’ ability to meaningfully reflect on the keyterm “transgression” in relation to the texts.
2. Through the collection of the students’ drawings, I will evaluate their ability to interpret a scene from a Gothic text.



# THE FACTS IN THE CASE OF M. VALDEMAR

by

Edgar Allan Poe

From THE WORKS OF EDGAR ALLAN POE, Vol. II  
A.C. Armstrong & Son, New York, 1884

Of course I shall not pretend to consider it any matter for wonder, that the extraordinary case of M. Valdemar has excited discussion. It would have been a miracle had it not—especially under the circumstances. Through the desire of all parties concerned, to keep the affair from the public, at least for the present, or until we had further opportunities for investigation—through our endeavors to effect this—a garbled or exaggerated account made its way into society, and became the source of many unpleasant misrepresentations; and, very naturally, of a great deal of disbelief.

It is now rendered necessary that I give the *facts*—as far as I comprehend them myself. They are, succinctly, these:

My attention, for the last three years, had been repeatedly drawn to the subject of Mesmerism; and, about nine month ago, it occurred to me, quite suddenly, that in the series of experiments made hitherto, there had been a very remarkable and most unaccountable omission:—no person had as yet been mesmerized *in articulo mortis*. It remained to be seen, first, in such condition, there existed in the patient any susceptibility to the magnetic influence; secondly, whether, if any existed, it was impaired or increased by the condition; thirdly, to what extent, or for how long a period, the encroachments of Death might be arrested by the process. There were other points to be ascertained, but these most excited my curiosity—the last in especial, from the immensely important character of its consequences.

In looking around me for some subject by whose means I might test these particulars, I was brought to think of my friend, M. Ernest Valdemar, the well-known compiler of the "Bibliotheca Forensica," and author (under the *nom de plume* of Issachar Marx) of the Polish versions of "Wallenstein" and "Gargantua." M. Valdemar, who has resided principally at Harlem, N.Y., since the year 1839, is (or was) particularly noticeable for the extreme spareness of his person—his lower limbs much resembling those of John Randolph; and, also, for the whiteness of his whiskers, in violent contrast to the blackness of his hair—the latter, in consequence, being very generally mistaken for a wig. His temperament was markedly nervous, and rendered him a good subject for mesmeric experiment. On two or three occasions I had put him to sleep with little difficulty,

but was disappointed in other results which his peculiar constitution had naturally led me to anticipate. His will was at no period positively, or thoroughly, under my control, and in regard to *clairvoyance*, I could accomplish with him nothing to be relied upon. I always attributed my failure at these points to the disordered state of his health. For some months previous to my becoming acquainted with him, his physicians had declared him in a confirmed phthisis. It was his custom, indeed, to speak calmly of his approaching dissolution, as of a matter neither to be avoided nor regretted.

When the ideas to which I have alluded first occurred to me, it was of course very natural that I should think of M. Valdemar. I knew the steady philosophy of the man too well to apprehend any scruples from *him*; and he had no relatives in America who would be likely to interfere. I spoke to him frankly upon the subject; and to my surprise, his interest seemed vividly excited. I say to my surprise; for, although he had always yielded his person freely to my experiments, he had never before given me any tokens of sympathy with what I did. His disease was of that character which would admit of exact calculation in respect to the epoch of its termination in death; and it was finally arranged between us that he would send for me about twenty-four hours before the period announced by his physicians as that of his decease.

It is now rather more than seven months since I received, from M. Valdemar himself, the subjoined note:

"MY DEAR P--.

"You may as well come *now*. D----- and F----- are agreed that I cannot hold out beyond to-morrow midnight; and I think they have hit the time very nearly.

VALDEMAR."

I received this note within half an hour after it was written, and in fifteen minutes more I was in the dying man's chamber. I had not seen him for ten days, and was appalled by the fearful alteration which the brief interval had wrought in him. His face wore a leaden hue; the eyes were utterly lustreless; and the emaciation was so extreme, that the skin had been broken through by the cheek-bones. His expectoration was excessive. The pulse was barely perceptible. He retained, nevertheless, in a very remarkable manner, both his mental power and a certain degree of physical strength. He spoke with distinctness—took some palliative medicines without aid—and, when I entered the room, was occupied in penciling memoranda in a pocket-book. He was propped up in the bed by pillows. Doctors D----- and F----- were in attendance.

After pressing Valdemar's hand, I took these gentlemen aside, and obtained from them a minute account of the patient's condition. The left lung had been for eighteen months in a semi-osseous or cartilaginous state, and was, of course, entirely useless for all purposes of vitality. The right, in its upper portion, was also partially, if not thoroughly, ossified, while the lower region was merely a mass of purulent tubercles, running one into another. Several extensive



perforations existed; and, at one point, permanent adhesion to the ribs had taken place. These appearances in the right lobe were of comparatively recent date. The ossification had proceeded with very unusual rapidity; no sign of it had been discovered a month before, and the adhesion had only been observed during the three previous days. Independently of the phthisis, the patient was suspected of aneurisem of the aorta; but on this point the osseous symptoms rendered an exact diagnosis impossible. It was the opinion of both physicians that M. Valdemar would die about midnight on the morrow (Sunday.) It was then seven o'clock on Saturday evening.

On quitting the invalid's bedside to hold conversation with myself, Doctors D----- and F----- had bidden him a final farewell. It had not been their intention to return; but, at my request, they agreed to look in upon the patient about ten the next night.

When they had gone, I spoke freely with M. Valdemar on the subject of his approaching dissolution, as well as, more particularly, of the experiment proposed. He still professed himself quite willing and even anxious to have it made, and urged me to commence it at once. A male and a female nurse were in attendance; but I did not feel myself altogether at liberty to engage in a task of this character with no more reliable witnesses than these people, in case of sudden accident, might prove. I therefore postponed operations until about eight the next night, when the arrival of a medical student, with whom I had some acquaintance, (Mr. Theodore L-----I,) relieved me from further embarrassment. It had been my design, originally, to wait for the physicians; but I was induced to proceed, first, by the urgent entreaties of M. Valdemar, and secondly, by my conviction that I had not a moment to lose, as he was evidently sinking fast.

Mr. L-----I was so kind as to accede to my desire that he would take notes of all that occurred; and it is from his memoranda that what I now have to relate is, for the most part, either condensed or copied *verbatim*.

It wanted about five minutes of eight when, taking the patient's hand, I begged him to state, as distinctly as he could, to Mr. L-----I, whether he (M. Valdemar) was entirely willing that I should make the experiment of mesmerizing him in his then condition.

He replied feebly, yet quite audibly: "Yes, I wish to be mesmerized" —adding immediately afterward: "I fear you have deferred it too long."

While he spoke thus, I commenced the passes which I had already found most effectual in subduing him. He was evidently influenced with the first lateral stroke of my hand across his forehead; but, although I exerted all my powers, no further perceptible effect was induced until some minutes after ten o'clock, when Doctors D----- and F----- called, according to appointment. I explained to them, in a few words, what I designed, and as they opposed no objection, saying that the patient was already in the death agony, I proceeded without hesitation —exchanging, however, the lateral passes for downward ones, and directing my gaze entirely into the right eye of the sufferer.



By this time his pulse was imperceptible and his breathing was stertorous, and at intervals of half a minute.

This condition was nearly unaltered for a quarter of an hour. At the expiration of this period, however, a natural although a very deep sigh escaped from the bosom of the dying man, and the stertorous breathing ceased—that is to say, its stertorousness was no longer apparent; the intervals were undiminished. The patient's extremities were of an icy coldness.

At five minutes before eleven, I perceived unequivocal signs of the mesmeric influence. The glassy roll of the eye was changed for that expression of uneasy *inward* examination which is never seen except in cases of sleep-waking, and which is quite impossible to mistake. With a few rapid lateral passes I made the lids quiver, as in incipient sleep, and with a few more I closed them altogether. I was not satisfied, however, with this, but continued the manipulations vigorously, and with the fullest exertion of the will, until I had completely stiffened the limbs of the slumberer, after placing them in a seemingly easy position. The legs were at full length; the arms were nearly so, and reposed on the bed at a moderate distance from the loins. The head was very slightly elevated.

When I had accomplished this, it was fully midnight, and I requested the gentlemen present to examine M. Valdemar's condition. After a few experiments, they admitted him to be in a perfect state of mesmeric trance. The curiosity of both the physicians was greatly excited. Dr. D----- resolved at once to remain with the patient all night, while Dr. F----- took leave with a promise to return at daybreak. Mr. L----- and the nurses remained.

We left M. Valdemar entirely undisturbed until about three o'clock in the morning, when I approached him and found him in precisely the same condition as when Dr. F----- went away—that is to say, he lay in the same position; the pulse was imperceptible; the breathing was gentle (scarcely noticeable, unless through the application of a mirror to the lips); the eyes were closed naturally; and the limbs were as rigid and as cold as marble. Still, the general appearance was not that of death.

As I approached M. Valdemar I made a kind of half effort to influence his right arm into pursuit of my own, as I passed the latter gently to and fro above his person. In such experiments with this patient, I had never perfectly succeeded before, and assuredly I had little thought of succeeding now; but to my astonishment, his arm very readily, although feebly, followed every direction I assigned it with mine. I determined to hazard a few words of conversation.

"M. Valdemar," I said, "are you asleep?" He made no answer, but I perceived a tremor about the lips, and was thus induced to repeat the question, again and again. At its third repetition, his whole frame was agitated by a very slight shivering; the eyelids unclosed themselves so far as to display a white line of a ball; the lips moved sluggishly, and from between them, in a barely audible whisper, issued the words:

"Yes;—asleep now. Do not wake me!—let me die so!"

Here I felt the limbs, and found them as rigid as ever. The right arm, as before, obeyed the direction of my hand. I questioned the sleep-waker again:

"Do you still feel pain in the breast, M. Valdemar?"

The answer now was immediate, but even less audible than before:

"No pain—I am dying!"

I did not think it advisable to disturb him further just then, and nothing more was said or done until the arrival of Dr. F-----, who came a little before sunrise, and expressed unbounded astonishment at finding the patient still alive. After feeling the pulse and applying a mirror to the lips, he requested me to speak to the sleep-waker again. I did so, saying:

"M. Valdemar, do you still sleep?"

As before, some minutes elapsed ere a reply was made; and during the interval the dying man seemed to be collecting his energies to speak. At my fourth repetition of the question, he said very faintly, almost inaudibly:

"Yes; still asleep—dying."

It was now the opinion, or rather the wish, of the physicians, that M. Valdemar should be suffered to remain undisturbed in his present apparently tranquil condition, until death should supervene—and this, it was generally agreed, must now take place within a few minutes. I concluded, however, to speak to him once more, and merely repeated my previous question.

While I spoke, there came a marked change over the countenance of the sleep-waker. The eyes rolled themselves slowly open, the pupils disappearing upwardly; the skin generally assumed a cadaverous hue, resembling not so much parchment as white paper; and the circular hectic spots which, hitherto, had been strongly defined in the centre of each cheek, *went out* at once. I use this expression, because the suddenness of their departure put me in mind of nothing so much as the extinguishment of a candle by a puff of the breath. The upper lip, at the same time, writhed itself away from the teeth, which it had previously covered completely; while the lower jaw fell with an audible jerk, leaving the mouth widely extended, and disclosing in full view the swollen and blackened tongue. I presume that no member of the party then present had been unaccustomed to death-bed horrors; but so hideous beyond conception was the appearance of M. Valdemar at this moment, that there was a general shrinking back from the region of the bed.

I now feel that I have reached a point of this narrative at which every reader will be startled into positive disbelief. It is my business, however, simply to proceed.

There was no longer the faintest sign of vitality in M. Valdemar; and concluding him to be dead, we were consigning him to the charge of the nurses, when a strong vibratory motion was observable in the tongue. This continued for perhaps



a minute. At the expiration of this period, there issued from the distended and motionless jaws a voice—such as it would be madness in me to attempt describing. There are, indeed, two or three epithets which might be considered as applicable to it in part; I might say, for example, that the sound was harsh, and broken and hollow; but the hideous whole is indescribable, for the simple reason that no similar sounds have ever jarred upon the ear of humanity. There were two particulars, nevertheless, which I thought then, and still think, might fairly be stated as characteristic of the intonation—as well adapted to convey some idea of its unearthly peculiarity. In the first place, the voice seemed to reach our ears—at least mine—from a vast distance, or from some deep cavern within the earth. In the second place, it impressed me (I fear, indeed, that it will be impossible to make myself comprehended) as gelatinous or glutinous matters impress the sense of touch.

I have spoken both of "sound" and of "voice." I mean to say that the sound was one of distinct—of even wonderfully, thrillingly distinct, syllabification. M. Valdemar *spoke*—obviously in reply to the question I had propounded to him a few minutes before. I had asked him, it will be remembered, if he still slept. Now he said:

"Yes;—no;—*I have been sleeping—and now —now —I am dead.*"

No person present even affected to deny, or attempted to repress, the unutterable, shuddering horror which these few words, thus uttered, were so well calculated to convey. Mr. L----l (the student) swooned. The nurses immediately left the chamber, and could not be induced to return. My own impressions I would not pretend to render intelligible to the reader. For nearly an hour, we busied ourselves, silently—without the utterance of a word—in endeavors to revive Mr. L----l. When he came to himself, we addressed ourselves again to an investigation of M. Valdemar's condition.

It remained in all respects as I have last described it, with the exception that the mirror no longer afforded evidence of respiration. An attempt to draw blood from the arm failed. I should mention, too, that this limb was no further subject to my will. I endeavored in vain to make it follow the direction of my hand. The only real indication, indeed, of the mesmeric influence, was now found in the vibratory movement of the tongue, whenever I addressed M. Valdemar a question. He seemed to be making an effort to reply, but had no longer sufficient volition. To queries put to him by any other person than myself he seemed utterly insensible—although I endeavored to place each member of the company in mesmeric *rappor*t with him. I believe that I have now related all that is necessary to an understanding of the sleep-waker's state at this epoch. Other nurses were procured; and at ten o'clock I left the house in company with the two physicians and Mr. L----l.

In the afternoon we all called again to see the patient. His condition remained precisely the same. We had now some discussion as to the propriety and feasibility of awakening him; but we had little difficulty in agreeing that no good purpose would be served by so doing. It was evident that, so far, death (or what is usually termed death) had been arrested by the mesmeric process. It seemed

clear to us all that to awaken M. Valdemar would be merely to insure his instant, or at least his speedy, dissolution.

From this period until the close of last week—*an interval of nearly seven months*—we continued to make daily calls at M. Valdemar's house, accompanied, now and then, by medical and other friends. All this time the sleep-waker remained *exactly* as I have last described him. The nurses' attentions were continual.

It was on Friday last that we finally resolved to make the experiment of awakening, or attempting to awaken him; and it is the (perhaps) unfortunate result of this latter experiment which has given rise to so much discussion in private circles—to so much of what I cannot help thinking unwarranted popular feeling.

For the purpose of relieving M. Valdemar from the mesmeric trance, I made use of the customary passes. These for a time were unsuccessful. The first indication of revival was afforded by a partial descent of the iris. It was observed, as specially remarkable, that this lowering of the pupil was accompanied by the profuse out-flowing of a yellowish ichor (from beneath the lids) of a pungent and highly offensive odor.

It was now suggested that I should attempt to influence the patient's arm as heretofore. I made the attempt and failed. Dr. F----- then intimated a desire to have me put a question. I did so, as follows:

"M. Valdemar, can you explain to us what are your feelings or wishes now?"

There was an instant return of the hectic circles on the cheeks: the tongue quivered, or rather rolled violently in the mouth (although the jaws and lips remained rigid as before), and at length the same hideous voice which I have already described, broke forth:

"For God's sake!—quick!—quick!—put me to sleep—or, quick!—waken me!—quick!—*I say to you that I am dead!*"

I was thoroughly unnerved, and for an instant remained undecided what to do. At first I made an endeavor to recompose the patient; but, failing in this through total abeyance of the will, I retraced my steps and as earnestly struggled to awaken him. In this attempt I soon saw that I should be successful—or at least I soon fancied that my success would be complete—and I am sure that all in the room were prepared to see the patient awaken.

For what really occurred, however, it is quite impossible that any human being could have been prepared.

As I rapidly made the mesmeric passes, amid ejaculations of "dead! dead!" absolutely *bursting* from the tongue and not from the lips of the sufferer, his whole frame at once—within the space of a single minute, or less, shrunk—crumbled—absolutely *rotted* away beneath my hands. Upon the bed, before the whole company, there lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome—of detestable

putrescence.

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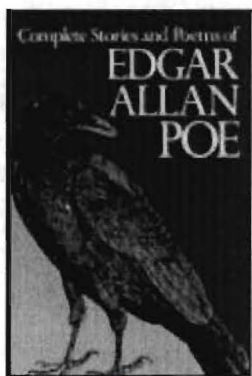
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## Day 5

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to note the similarities and differences between different video representations of the creation of the “creature.”

### Materials

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Copies of *Frankenstein*
- Film clips from different *Frankenstein* films
- Annotation worksheets
- Copies of assignment handout

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- Annotating
- Film
- Large group discussion

### Procedures

1. Write the journal prompt on the board: “What was your initial reaction regarding Victor’s need to create life outside the womb?”
2. Quick-write: students respond to the prompt on the board. (5 min.)
3. Students will watch clips of the creation of the creature from various films of *Frankenstein*. While viewing, students will fill in a worksheet citing similarities and differences from the films and the novel. (30 min.)
4. As a class, we will discuss both the film clips and the novel. (13 min.)
5. I will assign the paper. (2 min.)

### Evaluations

1. Through collection of the worksheet, I will evaluate whether or not students are able to cite similarities and differences between the films and the novel.



## **Transgression Paper Assignment (100 points)**

For this assignment you will demonstrate your understanding of the term “transgression” in relation to the Gothic literature genre. You will be tracing the transgressions committed by both Victor and the creature in the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, and comparing and contrasting the two.

You will be graded on your mastery and understanding of the term “transgression” and the organization of your paper more heavily than sentence structure and grammar. However, sentence structure and grammar will still be evaluated so proofread!

This paper should be between three and four pages long, double-spaced, and Times-New Roman font. Pages should be numbered, and the heading at the top left-hand corner of page one:

NAME

Class period

Assignment

Rough draft due: Day 11 (bring a copy to class)

**Final draft due: Day 15**

## **Day 6**

### **Objective**

1. Students will be able to use their Gothic definition of “transgression” and discuss what it looks like historically.

### **Materials**

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Laptop cart

### **Strategies**

- Quick-write
- Small group work

### **Procedures**

1. Write the prompt on the board: “What are some situations in history where transgression occurred? Explain.
2. Quick-write: students respond to the prompt on the board. (5 min.)
3. Students will be put into groups of three, and will be allowed to choose a historical era in which they want to research. They will then be given the rest of the class period to research this topic and figure out how it relates to “transgression,” and to create a brief presentation. (45 min.)

### **Evaluation**

1. Through observation of each group, I will evaluate if students are able to discuss what “transgression” looks like in a historical context.



## **Day 7**

### **Objectives**

1. Students will be able to discuss how “transgression” appears in a historical context.
2. Students will be able to present this information to their classmates.

### **Materials**

- Notes students compiled
- Pen/Pencil & Paper

### **Strategies**

- Presentations
- Annotations

### **Procedures**

1. Each group will present their information to the class in a 5 minute presentation. While groups are presenting, the rest of the students will be taking notes about the presentations. (30-45 min.)
2. With time left, we will briefly debrief and discuss each of the topics presented. (5-20 min.)

### **Evaluations**

1. Through viewing the presentations, I will evaluate each student’s ability to discuss “transgression” in a historical context.
2. Through viewing the presentations, I will evaluate each groups ability to adequately convey their information to the rest of the class.

## Day 8

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to identify the characteristics of a compare and contrast essay.
2. Students will be able to write their own compare and contrast essay.

### Materials

- Text books
- Copies of *Frankenstein*
- Venn diagrams

### Strategies

- Lecture
- Annotations
- Pair activity

### Procedures

1. Students will take notes while I lecture the characteristics of a compare and contrast essay. I will discuss key words and phrases that signify a compare and contrast essay and talk about what I will be looking for in their papers. (25 min.)
2. In pairs, students will be asked to fill out a Venn diagram and compare and contrast Victor and the creature. (25 min.)
3. Assign homework: *Frankenstein* pages 86-115.

### Evaluations

1. Through looking at students' notes, I will evaluate if they are able to identify the characteristics of a compare and contrast essay.
2. Upon collecting their final papers, I will evaluate if students are able to write their own compare and contrast essay.

## Day 9

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to discuss the novel in a meaningful manner.
2. Students will be able to dramatize a scene in the novel.

### Materials

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journal
- Copies of *Frankenstein*

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- Story drama

### Procedures

1. Write the prompt on the board: "What do you believe was the creature's motivation for killing Victor's new bride? Did the creature achieve his goal?"
2. Quick-write: students will respond to the prompt. (5 min.)
3. Students will be placed into groups where they will have to determine the most important elements of their scene and dramatize them. (30 min.)
4. Students will perform their dramatizations. (15 min.)

### Evaluations

1. Through observation, I will evaluate whether or not students are able to discuss the novel in a meaningful way.
2. Through viewing their performances, I will evaluate if the students were able to dramatize the scene.

## **Day 10**

### **Objective**

1. Students will make progress on their essays.

### **Materials**

- Copies of *Frankenstein*

### **Strategies**

- Work day
- Student/Teacher Conferencing

### **Procedures**

1. Students will spend the period working on their essays. (50 min.)
2. I will meet with each student individually to check in on their progress and answer any questions.
3. Assign homework: *Frankenstein* pages 115-158.

### **Evaluation**

1. Through conferencing with each student, I will be able to gauge whether or not the students are making progress with their essays.

## Day 11

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to use feedback from peers and the teacher to make their papers stronger.

### Materials

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Rough draft of their persuasive essays

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- Peer editing
- Student/Teacher conferencing

### Procedures

1. Write the prompt on the board: "Do you find that peer editing helps you? Why or why not?"
2. Quick-write: students respond to the prompt. (5 min.)
3. Students will exchange their papers with 3 other classmates and give one another constructive feedback. (45 min.)
4. As students are working, I will meet with each of them briefly to check in and see what issues are happening in their papers, and give suggestions to help improve their essays.
5. Assign homework: *Frankenstein* pages 158-179.

### Evaluation

1. Through collection of both the rough drafts and final essays, I will evaluate whether or not students were able to use the feedback given to them from classmates and their teacher to help make their papers stronger.



## Day 12

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to state and support why they believe the novel to be either “horror” or “terror.”
2. Students will be able to verbalize their opinions of the novel, characters, and story line.

### Materials

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Copies of *Frankenstein*

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- Small group discussion
- Large group discussion

### Procedures

1. Write prompt on the board: “What was your honest opinion of the novel?”
2. Quick-write: students respond to the prompt. (5 min.)
3. In small groups, students discuss their feelings about the book. (20 min.)
4. As a class, we’ll decide whether the novel is “horror” or “terror.” Discuss the novel as a whole. (20 min.)
5. In the time left, I will introduce the film the class will be watching. (5 min.)

### Evaluations

1. Through discussion, I will evaluate whether or not students are able to state and support why they believe the novel to be “horror” or “terror.”
2. Through observation and discussion, I will evaluate whether or not students are able to successfully articulate their own opinions.

## **Day 13-14**

### **Objective**

1. Students will be able to identify similarities and differences between the novel *Frankenstein* and the Robert DeNiro film version.

### **Materials**

- Copy of *Frankenstein* (1994) DVD
- Venn diagram

### **Strategies**

- Film
- Annotating

### **Procedures**

1. Students will watch the film *Frankenstein*, and compare the similarities and differences from the film and the novel in a Venn diagram. (50 min.)

### **Evaluation**

1. Through collection of Venn diagrams, I will evaluate whether or not students are able to identify the similarities and differences between the novel and the film.

## Day 15

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to identify similarities and differences between the novel *Frankenstein* and the Robert DeNiro film version.
2. Students will be able to verbalize their opinions on the film compared to the novel.

### Materials

- Copy of *Frankenstein* (1994) DVD
- Venn diagrams
- Copies of *Frankenstein* novels

### Strategies

- Film
- Annotating
- Large group discussion

### Procedures

1. Students will finish the film *Frankenstein* and will identify similarities and differences between the film and the novel on their Venn Diagrams. (20-30 min.)
2. As a class, we will discuss the similarities and differences that the students' noticed, and how they impacted meaning. (20-30 min.)
3. Students will turn in their final essays.

### Evaluations

1. Through the collection of the Venn diagrams, I will evaluate whether or not students were able to identify similarities and differences between the novel and the film.
2. Through discussion, I will evaluate whether or not the students are able to verbalize their opinions about the film compared to the novel.

# "Transgression" Paper Rubric

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>Content</b>	<b>Logical Development</b>	<b>Sentence Structure</b>	<b>Grammar, Punctuation, Spelling</b>
<b>Superior (A) or Good (B)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Significantly central idea clearly defined, and supported with concrete, relevant detail</li> <li>•Clear explanation of relationship of detail with central idea or paragraph topic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Theme planned so it progresses in stages, and develops with originality and attention to emphasis</li> <li>•Paragraphs effectively developed</li> <li>•Transitions between paragraphs effective.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Unified, forceful, varied.</li> <li>•Reflects parallel structure, active voice, emphasis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•A few grammar or punctuation errors, but does not distract from or confuse the meaning of the paper.</li> </ul>
<b>Average (C)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Central idea apparent but trivial or too general</li> <li>•Central idea supported with concrete detail, but detail repetitious, sketchy or irrelevant</li> <li>•Poor explanation of relationship of detail with central idea or paragraph topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Plan apparent, but not fulfilled; strays off point</li> <li>•Paragraphs usually effective</li> <li>•Transitions between paragraphs clear but abrupt, mechanical, or monotonous</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Correct, but lacking in reflecting parallel structure, active voice, emphasis, unification, forcefulness and variety.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Prevalence of grammar, punctuation or spelling errors that occasionally detract from and confuse the meaning of the paper.</li> </ul>



<p><b>Unacceptable (D-F)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Central idea lacking, confused, or unsupported by concrete and relevant details</li> <li>•Lacking explanation of relationship of detail with central idea or paragraph topic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Plan and purpose of theme not apparent; undeveloped or developed with irrelevance, redundancy, or inconsistency</li> <li>•Paragraphs incoherent, not unified, or undeveloped</li> <li>•Transitions between paragraphs unclear and ineffective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Not unified, incoherent, run-on, incomplete, monotonous, immature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Frequent grammar, punctuation and/or spelling errors that completely distract from the meaning of the paper.</li> </ul>
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**Total: \_\_\_\_\_/100**

\*Adapted from a rubric obtained in Dr. Hartman's English 395 course.

## **What Makes Someone a Monster?**

**Looking at “Monster” in Gothic Literature  
A 3-week unit plan**

## **Plan for Evaluation**

Journals (10)	→ 50 points
Participation	→ 25 points
KWL charts	→ 10 points
Peer editing	→ 40 points
Venn diagrams from film	→ 10 points
Final paper	→ 100 points
<b>Total Points</b>	<b>= 235 points</b>

# Planning Calendar

<p><b>Day 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Intro to the Gothic, "Monster," and <i>Frankenstein</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read Cohen's "Monster Culture"</p>	<p><b>Day 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Small group discussion of each thesis</li> <li>•Group presentation of each thesis</li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read p. 3-30 of <i>Frankenstein</i></p>	<p><b>Day 3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Discuss the beginning of <i>Frankenstein</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Day 4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Read aloud article about Psychology of Serial Killers</li> <li>•Discuss</li> <li>•Introduce paper assignment</li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read p. 31-57</p>	<p><b>Day 5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Small group book discussion</li> <li>•Watch different film representations of "the creation."</li> <li>•Assign the paper</li> </ul>
<p><b>Day 6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Small group readings &amp; discussion of "Mark of the Beast" or "What Was It?"</li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read p. 57-86</p>	<p><b>Day 7</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Define claims</li> <li>•Identify claims</li> <li>•Write claims</li> </ul>	<p><b>Day 8</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Discuss traditional monsters and how they relate to <i>Frankenstein</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read p. 86-115</p>	<p><b>Day 9</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Debate: "Who is the real monster of <i>Frankenstein</i>?"</li> </ul>	<p><b>Day 10</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Essay work day</li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read p. 115-158</p>
<p><b>Day 11</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Peer editing/Teacher editing day</li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Read p. 158-179</p>	<p><b>Day 12</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Journal</li> <li>•Small group book discussion</li> <li>•Large group discussion "Is it 'horror' or 'terror'?"</li> </ul>	<p><b>Day 13</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Define "satire"</li> <li>•Story drama</li> </ul>	<p><b>Day 14</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Film and annotations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Day 15</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Film and annotations</li> <li>•Turn in papers</li> </ul>



## Day 1

### Objectives

1. Students will preliminarily define the term “monster.”
2. Students will be able to identify characteristics of Gothic literature.
3. Student will be able to define the term Goth orally.
4. Students will be able to provide modern examples of the Gothic in popular culture.

### Materials

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Copy of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley
- Copies of Jeffery Jerome Cohen’s chapter “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)”

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- Small group discussion
- Large group discussion

### Procedure

1. Write prompt on the board, “What is a monster?”
2. Quick-write: students answer the question posed on the board. (5 min.)
3. Explain that this question is what we will be answering throughout the unit.
4. As a class, students will shout out characteristics of the Gothic. (5 min.)
5. As a class, we will develop a definition for the Gothic. (5 min.)
6. Working in groups of three or four students, the students will brainstorm modern examples of the Gothic in popular culture. (10 min.)
7. Each group will share at least one of their examples of modern Gothic. (5 min.)
8. Willing students will share their responses to the question posed on the board. (5 min.)
9. As a class, we will have a discussion about what monsters are, and what makes them monsters. (10 min.)
10. Brief introduction to *Frankenstein*. (5 min.)
11. Students will be provided copies of “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)” to read for homework.

## Evaluation

1. Through eventual collection of the quick-write, as well as through sharing I will evaluate if each student is able to preliminarily define the term "monster."
2. Through class discussion, I will evaluate the students' ability to recognize characteristics of the Gothic.
3. Through class discussion and collaboration, I will evaluate the students' ability to develop a suitable definition for the term "Gothic."
4. Through sharing, I will evaluate the students' ability to determine a suitable example of the Gothic in popular culture.

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**1 Monster Culture (Seven Theses)**

*Jeffrey Jerome Cohen*

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COHEN, JEFFREY JERMON. MONSTER ☐  
THEORY: READING CULTURE. 1996 ☐  
REGENTS OF THE UNIV. OF MINNESOTA: ☐  
MINNEAPOLIS. PP 315, PGS. 3-25.

What I will propose here by way of a first foray, as entrance into this book of monstrous content, is a sketch of a new *modus legendi*: a method of reading cultures from the monsters they engender. In doing so, I will partially violate two of the sacred dicta of recent cultural studies: the compulsion to historical specificity and the insistence that all knowledge (and hence all cartographies of that knowledge) is local. Of the first I will say only that in cultural studies today history (disguised perhaps as "culture") tends to be fetishized as a *telos*, as a final determinant of meaning; post de Man, post Foucault, post Hayden White, one must bear in mind that history is just another text in a procession of texts, and not a guarantor of any singular signification. A movement away from the *longue durée* and toward microeconomies (of capital or of gender) is associated most often with Foucauldian criticism; yet recent critics have found that where Foucault went wrong was mainly in his details, in his minute specifics. Nonetheless, his methodology—his archaeology of ideas, his histories of unthought—remains with good reason the chosen route of inquiry for most cultural critics today, whether they work in postmodern cyberculture or in the Middle Ages.

And so I would like to make some grand gestures. We live in an age that has rightly given up on Unified Theory, an age when we realize that history (like "individuality," "subjectivity," "gender," and "culture") is composed of a multitude of fragments, rather than of smooth epistemological wholes. Some fragments will be collected here and bound temporarily together to form a loosely integrated net—or, better, an unassimilated hybrid, a monstrous body. Rather than argue a "theory of

teratology," I offer by way of introduction to the essays that follow a set of breakable postulates in search of specific cultural moments. I offer seven theses toward understanding cultures through the monsters they bear.

### Thesis I: The Monster's Body Is a Cultural Body

Vampires, burial, death: inter the corpse where the road forks, so that when it springs from the grave, it will not know which path to follow. Drive a stake through its heart: it will be stuck to the ground at the fork, it will haunt that place that leads to many other places, that point of indecision. Behead the corpse, so that, acephalic, it will not know itself as subject, only as pure body.

The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place.<sup>1</sup> The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically "that which reveals," "that which warns," a glyph that seeks a hierophant. Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again. These epistemological spaces between the monster's bones are Derrida's familiar chasm of *différance*: a genetic uncertainty principle, the essence of the monster's vitality, the reason it always rises from the dissection table as its secrets are about to be revealed and vanishes into the night.

### Thesis II: The Monster Always Escapes

We see the damage that the monster wreaks, the material remains (the footprints of the yeti across Tibetan snow, the bones of the giant stranded on a rocky cliff), but the monster itself turns immaterial and vanishes, to reappear someplace else (for who is the yeti if not the medieval wild man? Who is the wild man if not the biblical and classical giant?). No matter how many times King Arthur killed the ogre of Mount Saint Michael, the monster reappeared in another heroic chronicle, bequeathing the Middle Ages an abundance of *morte d'Arthurs*. Regardless of how many times Sigourney Weaver's beleaguered Ripley utterly destroys the

ambiguous Alien that stalks her, its monstrous progeny return, ready to stalk again in another bigger-than-ever sequel. No monster tastes of death but once. The anxiety that condenses like green vapor into the form of the vampire can be dispersed temporarily, but the revenant by definition returns. And so the monster's body is both corporal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift.

Each time the grave opens and the unquiet slumberer strides forth ("come from the dead, / Come back to tell you all"), the message proclaimed is transformed by the air that gives its speaker new life. Monsters must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them. In speaking of the new kind of vampire invented by Bram Stoker, we might explore the foreign count's transgressive but compelling sexuality, as subtly alluring to Jonathan Harker as Henry Irving, Stoker's mentor, was to Stoker.<sup>2</sup> Or we might analyze Murnau's self-loathing appropriation of the same demon in *Nosferatu*, where in the face of nascent fascism the undercurrent of desire surfaces in plague and bodily corruption. Anne Rice has given the myth a modern rewriting in which homosexuality and vampirism have been conjoined, apotheosized; that she has created a pop culture phenomenon in the process is not insignificant, especially at a time when gender as a construct has been scrutinized at almost every social register. In Francis Coppola's recent blockbuster, *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, the homosexual subtext present at least since the appearance of Sheridan Le Fanu's lesbian lamia (*Carmilla*, 1872) has, like the red corpuscles that serve as the film's leitmotif, risen to the surface, primarily as an AIDS awareness that transforms the disease of vampirism into a sadistic (and very medieval) form of redemption through the torments of the body in pain. No coincidence, then, that Coppola was putting together a documentary on AIDS at the same time he was working on *Dracula*.

In each of these vampire stories, the undead returns in slightly different clothing, each time to be read against contemporary social movements or a specific, determining event: *la décadence* and its new possibilities, homophobia and its hateful imperatives, the acceptance of new subjectivities unfixed by binary gender, a fin de siècle social activism paternalistic in its embrace. Discourse extracting a transcultural, trans-temporal phenomenon labeled "the vampire" is of rather limited utility; even if vampiric figures are found almost worldwide, from ancient Egypt to modern Hollywood, each reappearance and its analysis is still bound



in a double act of construction and reconstitution.<sup>3</sup> "Monster theory" must therefore concern itself with strings of cultural moments, connected by a logic that always threatens to shift; invigorated by change and escape, by the impossibility of achieving what Susan Stewart calls the desired "fall or death, the stopping" of its gigantic subject,<sup>4</sup> monstrous interpretation is as much process as epiphany, a work that must content itself with fragments (footprints, bones, talismans, teeth, shadows, obscured glimpses—signifiers of monstrous passing that stand in for the monstrous body itself).

### Thesis III: The Monster Is the Harbinger of Category Crisis

The monster always escapes because it refuses easy categorization. Of the nightmarish creature that Ridley Scott brought to life in *Alien*, Harvey Greenberg writes:

It is a Linnean nightmare, defying every natural law of evolution; by turns bivalve, crustacean, reptilian, and humanoid. It seems capable of lying dormant within its egg indefinitely. It sheds its skin like a snake, its carapace like an arthropod. It deposits its young into other species like a wasp. . . . It responds according to Lamarckian and Darwinian principles.<sup>5</sup>

This refusal to participate in the classificatory "order of things" is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions.

Because of its ontological liminality, the monster notoriously appears at times of crisis as a kind of third term that problematizes the clash of extremes—as "that which questions binary thinking and introduces a crisis."<sup>6</sup> This power to evade and to undermine has coursed through the monster's blood from classical times, when despite all the attempts of Aristotle (and later Pliny, Augustine, and Isidore) to incorporate the monstrous races<sup>7</sup> into a coherent epistemological system, the monster always escaped to return to its habitations at the margins of the world (a purely conceptual locus rather than a geographic one).<sup>8</sup> Classical "wonder books" radically undermine the Aristotelian taxonomic system, for by refusing an easy compartmentalization of their monstrous contents, they demand a radical rethinking of boundary and normality. The too-precise laws of nature as set forth by science are gleefully violated in

the freakish compilation of the monster's body. A mixed category, the monster resists any classification built on hierarchy or a merely binary opposition, demanding instead a "system" allowing polyphony, mixed response (difference in sameness, repulsion in attraction), and resistance to integration—allowing what Hogle has called with a wonderful pun "a deeper play of differences, a nonbinary polymorphism at the 'base' of human nature."<sup>9</sup>

The horizon where the monsters dwell might well be imagined as the visible edge of the hermeneutic circle itself: the monstrous offers an escape from its hermetic path, an invitation to explore new spirals, new and interconnected methods of perceiving the world.<sup>10</sup> In the face of the monster, scientific inquiry and its ordered rationality crumble. The monstrous is a genus too large to be encapsulated in any conceptual system; the monster's very existence is a rebuke to boundary and enclosure; like the giants of *Mandeville's Travels*, it threatens to devour "all raw & quyk" any thinker who insists otherwise. The monster is in this way the living embodiment of the phenomenon Derrida has famously labeled the "supplement" (*ce dangereux supplément*):<sup>11</sup> it breaks apart bifurcating, "either/or" syllogistic logic with a kind of reasoning closer to "and/or," introducing what Barbara Johnson has called "a revolution in the very logic of meaning."<sup>12</sup>

Full of rebuke to traditional methods of organizing knowledge and human experience, the geography of the monster is an imperiling expanse, and therefore always a contested cultural space.

### Thesis IV: The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference

The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us. In its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within. Any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body, but for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual.

The exaggeration of cultural difference into monstrous aberration is familiar enough. The most famous distortion occurs in the Bible, where the aboriginal inhabitants of Canaan are envisioned as menacing giants to justify the Hebrew colonization of the Promised Land (Numbers 13). Representing an anterior culture as monstrous justifies its displacement

or extermination by rendering the act heroic. In medieval France the *chansons de geste* celebrated the crusades by transforming Muslims into demonic caricatures whose menacing lack of humanity was readable from their bestial attributes; by culturally glossing "Saracens" as "monstra," propagandists rendered rhetorically admissible the annexation of the East by the West. This representational project was part of a whole dictionary of strategic glosses in which "monstra" slipped into significations of the feminine and the hypermasculine.

A recent newspaper article on Yugoslavia reminds us how persistent these divisive mythologies can be, and how they can endure divorced from any grounding in historical reality:

A Bosnian Serb militiaman, hitchhiking to Sarajevo, tells a reporter in all earnestness that the Muslims are feeding Serbian children to the animals in the zoo. The story is nonsense. There aren't any animals left alive in the Sarajevo zoo. But the militiaman is convinced and can recall all the wrongs that Muslims may or may not have perpetrated during their 500 years of rule.<sup>13</sup>

In the United States, Native Americans were presented as unredeemable savages so that the powerful political machine of Manifest Destiny could push westward with disregard. Scattered throughout Europe by the Diaspora and steadfastly refusing assimilation into Christian society, Jews have been perennial favorites for xenophobic misrepresentation, for here was an alien culture living, working, and even at times prospering within vast communities dedicated to becoming homogeneous and monolithic. The Middle Ages accused the Jews of crimes ranging from the bringing of the plague to bleeding Christian children to make their Passover meal. Nazi Germany simply brought these ancient traditions of hate to their conclusion, inventing a Final Solution that differed from earlier persecutions only in its technological efficiency.

Political or ideological difference is as much a catalyst to monstrous representation on a micro level as cultural alterity in the macrocosm. A political figure suddenly out of favor is transformed like an unwilling participant in a science experiment by the appointed historians of the replacement regime: "monstrous history" is rife with sudden, Ovidian metamorphoses, from Vlad Tepes to Ronald Reagan. The most illustrious of these propaganda-bred demons is the English king Richard III, whom Thomas More famously described as "little of stature, ill fetured

of limmes, croke backed, his left shoulder much higher then his right, hard fauoured of visage. . . . hee came into the worlde with feete forward, . . . also not vntothed."<sup>14</sup> From birth, More declares, Richard was a monster, "his deformed body a readable text"<sup>15</sup> on which was inscribed his deviant morality (indistinguishable from an incorrect political orientation).

The almost obsessive descanting on Richard from Polydor Vergil in the Renaissance to the Friends of Richard III Incorporated in our own era demonstrates the process of "monster theory" at its most active: culture gives birth to a monster before our eyes, painting over the normally proportioned Richard who once lived, raising his shoulder to deform simultaneously person, cultural response, and the possibility of objectivity.<sup>16</sup> History itself becomes a monster: defeaturing, self-deconstructive, always in danger of exposing the sutures that bind its disparate elements into a single, unnatural body. At the same time Richard moves between Monster and Man, the disturbing suggestion arises that this incoherent body, denaturalized and always in peril of disaggregation, may well be our own.

The difficult project of constructing and maintaining gender identities elicits an array of anxious responses throughout culture, producing another impetus to teratogenesis. The woman who oversteps the boundaries of her gender role risks becoming a Scylla, Weird Sister, Lilith ("die erste Eva," "la mère obscure"),<sup>17</sup> Bertha Mason, or Gorgon.<sup>18</sup> "Deviant" sexual identity is similarly susceptible to monsterization. The great medieval encyclopedist Vincent of Beauvais describes the visit of a hermaphroditic cynocephalus to the French court in his *Speculum naturale* (31.126).<sup>19</sup> Its male reproductive organ is said to be disproportionately large, but the monster could use either sex at its own discretion. Bruno Roy writes of this fantastic hybrid: "What warning did he come to deliver to the king? He came to bear witness to sexual norms. . . . He embodied the punishment earned by those who violate sexual taboos."<sup>20</sup> This strange creature, a composite of the supposedly discrete categories "male" and "female," arrives before King Louis to validate heterosexuality over homosexuality, with its supposed inversions and transformations ("Equa fit equus," one Latin writer declared; "The horse becomes a mare").<sup>21</sup> The strange dog-headed monster is a living excoriation of gender ambiguity and sexual abnormality, as Vincent's cultural moment defines them: heteronormalization incarnate.



From the classical period into the twentieth century, race has been almost as powerful a catalyst to the creation of monsters as culture, gender, and sexuality. Africa early became the West's significant other, the sign of its ontological difference simply being skin color. According to the Greek myth of Phaëton, the denizens of mysterious and uncertain Ethiopia were black because they had been scorched by the too-close passing of the sun. The Roman naturalist Pliny assumed nonwhite skin to be symptomatic of a complete difference in temperament and attributed Africa's darkness to climate; the intense heat, he said, had burned the Africans' skin and malformed their bodies (*Natural History*, 2.80). These differences were quickly moralized through a pervasive rhetoric of deviance. Paulinus of Nola, a wealthy landowner turned early church homilist, explained that the Ethiopians had been scorched by sin and vice rather than by the sun, and the anonymous commentator to Theodulus's influential *Ecloga* (tenth century) succinctly glossed the meaning of the word *Ethiopianus*: "Ethiopians, that is, sinners. Indeed, sinners can rightly be compared to Ethiopians, who are black men presenting a terrifying appearance to those beholding them."<sup>22</sup> Dark skin was associated with the fires of hell, and so signified in Christian mythology demonic provenance. The perverse and exaggerated sexual appetite of monsters generally was quickly affixed to the Ethiopian; this linking was only strengthened by a xenophobic backlash as dark-skinned people were forcibly imported into Europe early in the Renaissance. Narratives of miscegenation arose and circulated to sanction official policies of exclusion; Queen Elizabeth is famous for her anxiety over "blackamoors" and their supposed threat to the "increase of people of our own nation."<sup>23</sup>

Through all of these monsters the boundaries between personal and national bodies blur. To complicate this category confusion further, one kind of alterity is often written as another, so that national difference (for example) is transformed into sexual difference. Giraldus Cambrensis demonstrates just this slippage of the foreign in his *Topography of Ireland*; when he writes of the Irish (ostensibly simply to provide information about them to a curious English court, but actually as a first step toward invading and colonizing the island), he observes:

It is indeed a most filthy race, a race sunk in vice, a race more ignorant than all other nations of the first principles of faith. . . . These people who have customs so different from others, and so opposite to them, on making signs either with the hands or the head, beckon when they mean that

you should go away, and nod backwards as often as they wish to be rid of you. Likewise, in this nation, the men pass their water sitting, the women standing. . . . The women, also, as well as the men, ride astride, with their legs stuck out on each side of the horse.<sup>24</sup>

One kind of inversion becomes another as Giraldus deciphers the alphabet of Irish culture—and reads it backwards, against the norm of English masculinity. Giraldus creates a vision of monstrous gender (aberrant, demonstrative): the violation of the cultural codes that valence gendered behaviors creates a rupture that must be cemented with (in this case) the binding, corrective mortar of English normalcy. A bloody war of subjugation followed immediately after the promulgation of this text, remained potent throughout the High Middle Ages, and in a way continues to this day.

Through a similar discursive process the East becomes feminized (Said) and the soul of Africa grows dark (Gates).<sup>25</sup> One kind of difference becomes another as the normative categories of gender, sexuality, national identity, and ethnicity slide together like the imbricated circles of a Venn diagram, abjecting from the center that which becomes the monster. This violent foreclosure erects a self-validating, Hegelian master/slave dialectic that naturalizes the subjugation of one cultural body by another by writing the body excluded from personhood and agency as in every way different, monstrous. A polysemy is granted so that a greater threat can be encoded; multiplicity of meanings, paradoxically, iterates the same restricting, agitprop representations that narrowed signification performs. Yet a danger resides in this multiplication: as difference, like a Hydra, sprouts two heads where one has been lopped away, the possibilities of escape, resistance, disruption arise with more force.

René Girard has written at great length about the real violence these debasing representations enact, connecting monsterizing depiction with the phenomenon of the scapegoat. Monsters are never created *ex nihilo*, but through a process of fragmentation and recombination in which elements are extracted "from various forms" (including—indeed, especially—marginalized social groups) and then assembled as the monster, "which can then claim an independent identity."<sup>26</sup> The political-cultural monster, the embodiment of radical difference, paradoxically threatens to *erase* difference in the world of its creators, to demonstrate

the potential for the system to differ from its own difference, in other words not to be different at all, to cease to exist as a system. . . . Difference that exists outside the system is terrifying because it reveals the truth of the system, its relativity, its fragility, and its mortality. . . . Despite what is said around us persecutors are never obsessed with difference but rather by its unutterable contrary, the lack of difference.<sup>27</sup>

By revealing that difference is arbitrary and potentially free-floating, mutable rather than essential, the monster threatens to destroy not just individual members of a society, but the very cultural apparatus through which individuality is constituted and allowed. Because it is a body across which difference has been repeatedly written, the monster (like Frankenstein's creature, that combination of odd somatic pieces stitched together from a community of cadavers) seeks out its author to demand its *raison d'être*—and to bear witness to the fact that it could have been constructed Otherwise. Godzilla trampled Tokyo; Girard frees him here to fragment the delicate matrix of relational systems that unite every private body to the public world.

#### Thesis V: The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible

The monster resists capture in the epistemological nets of the erudite, but it is something more than a Bakhtinian ally of the popular. From its position at the limits of knowing, the monster stands as a warning against exploration of its uncertain demesnes. The giants of Patagonia, the dragons of the Orient, and the dinosaurs of Jurassic Park together declare that curiosity is more often punished than rewarded, that one is better off safely contained within one's own domestic sphere than abroad, away from the watchful eyes of the state. The monster prevents mobility (intellectual, geographic, or sexual), delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move. To step outside this official geography is to risk attack by some monstrous border patrol or (worse) to become monstrous oneself.

Lycaon, the first werewolf in Western literature, undergoes his lupine metamorphosis as the culmination of a fable of hospitality.<sup>28</sup> Ovid relates how the primeval giants attempted to plunge the world into anarchy by wrenching Olympus from the gods, only to be shattered by divine thunderbolts. From their scattered blood arose a race of men who continued their fathers' malignant ways.<sup>29</sup> Among this wicked progeny was Lycaon, king of Arcadia. When Jupiter arrived as a guest at his house,

Lycaon tried to kill the ruler of the gods as he slept, and the next day served him pieces of a servant's body as a meal. The enraged Jupiter punished this violation of the host-guest relationship by transforming Lycaon into a monstrous semblance of that lawless, godless state to which his actions would drag humanity back:

The king himself lies in terror and, gaining the fields, howls aloud, attempting in vain to speak. His mouth of itself gathers foam, and with his accustomed greed for blood he turns against the sheep, delighting still in slaughter. His garments change to shaggy hair, his arms to legs. He turns into a wolf, and yet retains some traces of his former shape.<sup>30</sup>

The horribly fascinating loss of Lycaon's humanity merely reifies his previous moral state; the king's body is rendered all transparency, instantly and insistently readable. The power of the narrative prohibition peaks in the lingering description of the monstrously composite Lycaon, at that median where he is both man and beast, dual natures in a helpless tumult of assertion. The fable concludes when Lycaon can no longer speak, only signify.

Whereas monsters born of political expedience and self-justifying nationalism function as living invitations to action, usually military (invasions, usurpations, colonizations), the monster of prohibition polices the borders of the possible, interdicting through its grotesque body some behaviors and actions, envaluing others. It is possible, for example, that medieval merchants intentionally disseminated maps depicting sea serpents like Leviathan at the edges of their trade routes in order to discourage further exploration and to establish monopolies.<sup>31</sup> Every monster is in this way a double narrative, two living stories: one that describes how the monster came to be and another, its testimony, detailing what cultural use the monster serves. The monster of prohibition exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture, to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot—*must not*—be crossed.

Primarily these borders are in place to control the traffic in women, or more generally to establish strictly homosocial bonds, the ties between men that keep a patriarchal society functional. A kind of herdsman, this monster delimits the social space through which cultural bodies may move, and in classical times (for example) validated a tight, hierarchical system of naturalized leadership and control where every man had a



functional place.<sup>32</sup> The prototype in Western culture for this kind of "geographic" monster is Homer's Polyphemos. The quintessential xenophobic rendition of the foreign (the *barbaric*—that which is unintelligible within a given cultural-linguistic system),<sup>33</sup> the Cyclopes are represented as savages who have not "a law to bless them" and who lack the *techné* to produce (Greek-style) civilization. Their archaism is conveyed through their lack of hierarchy and of a politics of precedent. This dissociation from community leads to a rugged individualism that in Homeric terms can only be horrifying. Because they live without a system of tradition and custom, the Cyclopes are a danger to the arriving Greeks, men whose identities are contingent upon a compartmentalized function within a deindividualizing system of subordination and control. Polyphemos's victims are devoured, engulfed, made to vanish from the public gaze: cannibalism as incorporation into the wrong cultural body.

The monster is a powerful ally of what Foucault calls "the society of the panopticon," in which "polymorphous conducts [are] actually extracted from people's bodies and from their pleasures . . . [to be] drawn out, revealed, isolated, intensified, incorporated, by multifarious power devices."<sup>34</sup> Susan Stewart has observed that "the monster's sexuality takes on a separate life";<sup>35</sup> Foucault helps us to see why. The monster embodies those sexual practices that must not be committed, or that may be committed only through the body of the monster. *She* and *Them!*: the monster enforces the cultural codes that regulate sexual desire.

Anyone familiar with the low-budget science fiction movie craze of the 1950s will recognize in the preceding sentence two superb films of the genre, one about a radioactive virago from outer space who kills every man she touches, the other a social parable in which giant ants (really, Communists) burrow beneath Los Angeles (that is, Hollywood) and threaten world peace (that is, American conservatism). I connect these two seemingly unrelated titles here to call attention to the anxieties that monsterized their subjects in the first place, and to enact syntactically an even deeper fear: that the two will join in some unholy miscegenation. We have seen that the monster arises at the gap where difference is perceived as dividing a recording voice from its captured subject; the criterion of this division is arbitrary, and can range from anatomy or skin color to religious belief, custom, and political ideology. The monster's destructiveness is really a deconstructiveness: it threatens to reveal that difference originates in process, rather than in fact (and that "fact" is

subject to constant reconstruction and change). Given that the recorders of the history of the West have been mainly European and male, women (*She*) and nonwhites (*Them!*) have found themselves repeatedly transformed into monsters, whether to validate specific alignments of masculinity and whiteness, or simply to be pushed from its realm of thought.<sup>36</sup> Feminine and cultural others are monstrous enough by themselves in patriarchal society, but when they threaten to mingle, the entire economy of desire comes under attack.

As a vehicle of prohibition, the monster most often arises to enforce the laws of exogamy, both the incest taboo (which establishes a traffic in women by mandating that they marry outside their families) and the decrees against interracial sexual mingling (which limit the parameters of that traffic by policing the boundaries of culture, usually in the service of some notion of group "purity").<sup>37</sup> Incest narratives are common to every tradition and have been extensively documented, mainly owing to Lévi-Strauss's elevation of the taboo to the founding base of patriarchal society. Miscegenation, that intersection of misogyny (gender anxiety) and racism (no matter how naive), has received considerably less critical attention. I will say a few words about it here.

The Bible has long been the primary source for divine decrees against interracial mixing. One of these pronouncements is a straightforward command from God that comes through the mouth of the prophet Joshua (Joshua 23:12ff.); another is a cryptic episode in Genesis much elaborated during the medieval period, alluding to "sons of God" who impregnate the "daughters of men" with a race of wicked giants (Genesis 6:4). The monsters are here, as elsewhere, expedient representations of other cultures, generalized and demonized to enforce a strict notion of group sameness. The fears of contamination, impurity, and loss of identity that produce stories like the Genesis episode are strong, and they reappear incessantly. Shakespeare's Caliban, for example, is the product of such an illicit mingling, the "freckled whelp" of the Algerian witch Sycorax and the devil. Charlotte Brontë reversed the usual paradigm in *Jane Eyre* (white Rochester and lunatic Jamaican Bertha Mason), but horror movies as seemingly innocent as *King Kong* demonstrate miscegenation anxiety in its brutal essence. Even a film as recent as 1979's immensely successful *Alien* may have a cognizance of the fear in its underworkings: the grotesque creature that stalks the heroine (dressed in the final scene only in her underwear) drips a glistening slime of K-Y Jelly

from its teeth; the jaw tendons are constructed of shredded condoms; and the man inside the rubber suit is Bolaji Badejo, a Masai tribesman standing seven feet tall who happened to be studying in England at the time the film was cast.<sup>38</sup>

The narratives of the West perform the strangest dance around that fire in which miscegenation and its practitioners have been condemned to burn. Among the flames we see the old women of Salem hanging, accused of sexual relations with the black devil; we suspect they died because they crossed a different border, one that prohibits women from managing property and living solitary, unmanaged lives. The flames devour the Jews of thirteenth-century England, who stole children from proper families and baked seder matzo with their blood; as a menace to the survival of English race and culture, they were expelled from the country and their property confiscated. A competing narrative again implicates monstrous economics—the Jews were the money lenders, the state and its commerce were heavily indebted to them—but this second story is submerged in a horrifying fable of cultural purity and threat to Christian continuance. As the American frontier expanded beneath the banner of Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth century, tales circulated about how “Indians” routinely kidnapped white women to furnish wives for themselves; the West was a place of danger waiting to be tamed into farms, its menacing native inhabitants fit only to be dispossessed. It matters little that the protagonist of Richard Wright’s *Native Son* did not rape and butcher his employer’s daughter; that narrative is supplied by the police, by an angry white society, indeed by Western history itself. In the novel, as in life, the threat occurs when a nonwhite leaves the reserve abandoned to him; Wright envisions what happens when the horizon of narrative expectation is firmly set, and his conclusion (born out in seventeenth-century Salem, medieval England, and nineteenth-century America) is that the actual circumstances of history tend to vanish when a narrative of miscegenation can be supplied.

The monster is transgressive, too sexual, perversely erotic, a lawbreaker; and so the monster and all that it embodies must be exiled or destroyed. The repressed, however, like Freud himself, always seems to return.

#### Thesis VI: Fear of the Monster Is Really a Kind of Desire

The monster is continually linked to forbidden practices, in order to normalize and to enforce. The monster also attracts. The same creatures

who terrify and interdict can evoke potent escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint. This simultaneous repulsion and attraction at the core of the monster’s composition accounts greatly for its continued cultural popularity, for the fact that the monster seldom can be contained in a simple, binary dialectic (thesis, antithesis . . . no synthesis). We distrust and loathe the monster at the same time we envy its freedom, and perhaps its sublime despair.

Through the body of the monster fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion are allowed safe expression in a clearly delimited and permanently liminal space. Escapist delight gives way to horror only when the monster threatens to overstep these boundaries, to destroy or deconstruct the thin walls of category and culture. When contained by geographic, generic, or epistemic marginalization, the monster can function as an alter ego, as an alluring projection of (an Other) self. The monster awakens one to the pleasures of the body, to the simple and fleeting joys of being frightened, or frightening—to the experience of mortality and corporality. We watch the monstrous spectacle of the horror film because we know that the cinema is a temporary place, that the jolting sensuousness of the celluloid images will be followed by reentry into the world of comfort and light.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, the story on the page before us may horrify (whether it appears in the *New York Times* news section or Stephen King’s latest novel matters little), so long as we are safe in the knowledge of its nearing end (the number of pages in our right hand is dwindling) and our liberation from it. Aurally received narratives work no differently; no matter how unsettling the description of the giant, no matter how many unbaptized children and hapless knights he devours, King Arthur will ultimately destroy him. The audience knows how the genre works.

Times of carnival temporally marginalize the monstrous, but at the same time allow it a safe realm of expression and play: on Halloween everyone is a demon for a night. The same impulse to ataractic fantasy is behind much lavishly bizarre manuscript marginalia, from abstract scribbles at the edges of an ordered page to preposterous animals and vaguely humanoid creatures of strange anatomy that crowd a biblical text. Gargoyles and ornately sculpted grotesques, lurking at the crossbeams or upon the roof of the cathedral, likewise record the liberating fantasies of a bored or repressed hand suddenly freed to populate the



margins. Maps and travel accounts inherited from antiquity invented whole geographies of the mind and peopled them with exotic and fantastic creatures; Ultima Thule, Ethiopia, and the Antipodes were the medieval equivalents of outer space and virtual reality, imaginary (wholly verbal) geographies accessible from anywhere, never meant to be discovered but always waiting to be explored. Jacques Le Goff has written that the Indian Ocean (a "mental horizon" imagined, in the Middle Ages, to be completely enclosed by land) was a cultural space

where taboos were eliminated or exchanged for others. The weirdness of this world produced an impression of liberation and freedom. The strict morality imposed by the Church was contrasted with the discomfiting attractiveness of a world of bizarre tastes, which practiced coprophagy and cannibalism; of bodily innocence, where man, freed of the modesty of clothing, rediscovered nudism and sexual freedom; and where, once rid of restrictive monogamy and family barriers, he could give himself over to polygamy, incest, and eroticism.<sup>40</sup>

The habitations of the monsters (Africa, Scandinavia, America, Venus, the Delta Quadrant—whatever land is sufficiently distant to be exoticized) are more than dark regions of uncertain danger: they are also realms of happy fantasy, horizons of liberation. Their monsters serve as secondary bodies through which the possibilities of other genders, other sexual practices, and other social customs can be explored. Hermaphrodites, Amazons, and lascivious cannibals beckon from the edges of the world, the most distant planets of the galaxy.

The co-optation of the monster into a symbol of the desirable is often accomplished through the neutralization of potentially threatening aspects with a liberal dose of comedy: the thundering giant becomes the bumbling giant.<sup>41</sup> Monsters may still function, however, as the vehicles of causative fantasies even without their valences reversed. What Bakhtin calls "official culture" can transfer all that is viewed as undesirable in itself into the body of the monster, performing a wish-fulfillment drama of its own; the scapegoated monster is perhaps ritually destroyed in the course of some official narrative, purging the community by eliminating its sins. The monster's eradication functions as an exorcism and, when retold and promulgated, as a catechism. The monastically manufactured *Queste del Saint Graal* serves as an ecclesiastically sanctioned antidote to the looser morality of the secular romances; when Sir Bors comes across a castle where "ladies of high descent and rank" tempt him to sexual

indulgence, these ladies are, of course, demons in lascivious disguise. When Bors refuses to sleep with one of these transcorporeal devils (described as "so lovely and so fair that it seemed all earthly beauty was embodied in her"), his steadfast assertion of control banishes them all shrieking back to hell.<sup>42</sup> The episode valorizes the celibacy so central to the authors' belief system (and so difficult to enforce) while inculcating a lesson in morality for the work's intended secular audience, the knights and courtly women fond of romances.

Seldom, however, are monsters as uncomplicated in their use and manufacture as the demons that haunt Sir Bors. Allegory may flatten a monster rather thin, as when the vivacious demon of the Anglo-Saxon hagiographic poem *Juliana* becomes the one-sided complainer of Cynewulf's *Elene*. More often, however, the monster retains a haunting complexity. The dense symbolism that makes a thick description of the monsters in Spenser, Milton, and even *Beowulf* so challenging reminds us how permeable the monstrous body can be, how difficult to dissect.

This corporal fluidity, this simultaneity of anxiety and desire, ensures that the monster will always dangerously entice. A certain intrigue is allowed even Vincent of Beauvais's well-endowed cynocephalus, for he occupies a textual space of allure before his necessary dismissal, during which he is granted an undeniable charm. The monstrous lurks somewhere in that ambiguous, primal space between fear and attraction, close to the heart of what Kristeva calls "abjection":

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, fascinates desire, which, nonetheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. . . . But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.<sup>43</sup>

And the self that one stands so suddenly and so nervously beside is the monster.

The monster is the abjected fragment that enables the formation of all kinds of identities—personal, national, cultural, economic, sexual, psychological, universal, particular (even if that "particular" identity is

an embrace of the power/status/knowledge of abjection itself); as such it reveals their partiality, their contiguity. A product of a multitude of morphogeneses (ranging from somatic to ethnic) that align themselves to imbue meaning to the Us and Them behind every cultural mode of seeing, the monster of abjection resides in that marginal geography of the Exterior, beyond the limits of the Thinkable, a place that is doubly dangerous: simultaneously "exorbitant" and "quite close." Judith Butler calls this conceptual locus "a domain of unlivability and unintelligibility that bounds the domain of intelligible effects," but points out that even when discursively closed off, it offers a base for critique, a margin from which to reread dominant paradigms.<sup>44</sup> Like Grendel thundering from the mere or Dracula creeping from the grave, like Kristeva's "boomerang, a vortex of summons" or the uncanny Freudian-Lacanian return of the repressed, the monster is always coming back, always at the verge of irruption.

Perhaps it is time to ask the question that always arises when the monster is discussed seriously (the inevitability of the question a symptom of the deep anxiety about what is and what should be thinkable, an anxiety that the process of monster theory is destined to raise): Do monsters really exist?

Surely they must, for if they did not, how could we?

### Thesis VII: The Monster Stands at the Threshold . . . of Becoming

"This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine."

Monsters are our children. They can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, but they always return. And when they come back, they bring not just a fuller knowledge of our place in history and the history of knowing our place, but they bear self-knowledge, *human* knowledge—and a discourse all the more sacred as it arises from the Outside. These monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place. They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression. They ask us why we have created them.

### Notes

1. Literally, here, *Zeitgeist*: Time Ghost, the bodiless spirit that uncannily incorporates a "place" that is a series of places, the crossroads that is a point in a *movement* toward an uncertain elsewhere. Bury the *Zeitgeist* by the crossroads: it is confused as it awakens, it is not going anywhere, it intersects everywhere; all roads lead back to the monster.

2. I realize that this is an interpretive biographical maneuver Barthes would surely have called "the living death of the author."

3. Thus the superiority of Joan Copjec's "Vampires, Breast-feeding, and Anxiety," *October* 58 (Fall 1991): 25–43, to Paul Barber's *Vampires, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988).

4. "The giant is represented through movement, through being in time. Even in the ascription of the still landscape to the giant, it is the activities of the giant, his or her legendary actions, that have resulted in the observable trace. In contrast to the still and perfect universe of the miniature, the gigantic represents the order and disorder of historical forces." Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 86.

5. Harvey R. Greenberg, "Reimaging the Gargoyle: Psychoanalytic Notes on *Alien*," in *Close Encounters: Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction*, ed. Constance Penley, Elisabeth Lyon, Lynn Spigel, and Janet Bergstrom (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 90–91.

6. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 11. Garber writes at some length about "category crisis," which she defines as "a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another: black/white, Jew/Christian, noble/bourgeois, master/servant, master/slave. . . . [That which crosses the border, like the transvestite] will always function as a mechanism of overdetermination—a mechanism of displacement from one blurred boundary to another. An analogy here might be the so-called 'tagged' gene that shows up in a genetic chain, indicating the presence of some otherwise hidden condition. It is not the gene itself, but its presence, that marks the trouble spot, indicating the likelihood of a crisis somewhere, elsewhere" (pp. 16–17). Note, however, that whereas Garber insists that the transvestite must be read *with* rather than *through*, the monster can be read only *through*—for the monster, pure culture, is nothing of itself.

7. These are the ancient monsters recorded first by the Greek writers Ktesias and Megasthenes, and include such wild imaginings as the Pygmies, the Sciapods (men with one large foot with which they can hop about at tremendous speed or that they can lift over their reclining bodies as a sort of beach umbrella), Blemmyae ("men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders," in Othello's words), and Cynocephali, ferocious dog-headed men who are anthropophagous to boot. John Block Friedman has called these creatures the Plinian races, after the classical encyclopedist who bestowed them to the Middle Ages and early modern period. *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).



## Day 2

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to explain one of the seven theses from Cohen's chapter.
2. Students will be able to define the term "monster."

### Materials

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Copies of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's chapter "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)"

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- Jigsaw

### Procedures

1. Write the journal prompt on the board, "Which of the seven theses was the most interesting to you? Why?"
2. Quick-write: students will respond to the prompt. (5 min.)
3. Students will be divided into seven groups, and will discuss their assigned thesis from Cohen's work, and will then come up with an example of this thesis. Those students not speaking should be taking notes. (20 min.)
4. Each group will explain their thesis and example to the rest of the class. (20 min.)
5. As a class, using each of these theses we will define the term "monster."
6. Assign homework: *Frankenstein* pages 3-30.

### Evaluations

1. Through viewing each group's presentation, I will evaluate whether students are able to thoroughly explain their thesis.
2. Through class discussion and collaboration, I will evaluate the students' ability to develop a suitable definition for "monster."

## Day 3

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to define "horror" and "terror"
2. Students will be able to make predictions about the text.

### Materials

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Copies of *Frankenstein*
- Pen and Paper

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- KWL charts
- Large group discussion

### Procedures

1. Write the journal prompt on the board: "What is the difference between the terms 'horror' and 'terror?'"
2. Quick-write: students respond to the prompt in their journals. (5 min.)
3. As a class, discuss and define the terms "horror" and "terror." (15 min.)
4. Students will construct and fill out a KWL chart for *Frankenstein*. (15 min.)
5. Have a large class discussion of the beginning of the book. (15 min.)

### Evaluations

1. Through class discussion and collaboration, I will evaluate the students' ability to develop suitable definitions for "horror" and "terror."
2. Through collecting the KWL charts and discussion, I will evaluate whether or not students are able to make logical predications about the text.

## Day 4

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to analyze the term "monster" in real-life scenarios and people.
2. Students will be able to begin thinking about their unit assignment with no lingering questions.

### Materials

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Copies of information about different serial killers

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- Small group discussion
- Large group discussion

### Procedures

1. Write journal prompt on the board: "Are people inherently good or bad? Why or why not?"
2. Quick-write: Students respond to prompt on the board. (5 min.)
3. Students will be divided into groups of 4-5, and will be given a packet of information about a specific serial killer. They will talk about which (if any) of the seven theses apply, and talk about the role of nature versus nurture. (20 min.)
4. Each group will discuss what they talked about with the entire class, and then the class will have a discussion about what was noticed. (20 min.)
5. I will introduce the class to the final paper assignment for the unit so that they may decide their topic, and answer any questions that the students may have. (5 min.)
6. Assign homework: *Frankenstein* pages 31-57.

### Evaluations

1. Through observation of small group discussions, I will evaluate each student's ability to use "monster" within real-life contexts.
2. Through discussion of the assignment, I will evaluate whether or not students are clear on what the assignment entails.

## Day 5

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to note the similarities and differences between different video representations of the creation of the "creature."

### Materials

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Copies of *Frankenstein*
- Film clips from different *Frankenstein* films
- Annotation worksheets
- Copies of assignment handout

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- Annotating
- Film
- Large group discussion

### Procedures

1. Write the journal prompt on the board: "What was your initial reaction to the creature?"
2. Quick-write: students respond to the prompt on the board. (5 min.)
3. Students will watch clips of the creation of the creature from various films of *Frankenstein*. While viewing, students will fill in a worksheet citing similarities and differences from the films and the novel. (30 min.)
4. As a class, we will discuss both the film clips and the novel. (13 min.)
5. I will assign the paper. (2 min.)

### Evaluations

1. Through collection of the worksheet, I will evaluate whether or not students are able to cite similarities and differences between the films and the novel.



## **“Monster” Paper Assignment (100 points)**

For this assignment you will demonstrate your understanding of the term “monster” in relation to the Gothic literature genre. You will be writing an argumentative essay where you will decide who the true monster of the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, and use textual evidence to support your stance.

You will be graded on your mastery and understanding of the term “monster” and the organization of your paper more heavily than sentence structure and grammar. However, sentence structure and grammar will still be evaluated so proofread!

This paper should be between three and four pages long, double-spaced, and Times-New Roman font. Pages should be numbered, and the heading at the top left-hand corner of page one:

NAME

Class period

Assignment

Rough draft due: Day 11 (bring a copy to class)

**Final draft due: Day 15**

## **Day 6**

### **Objectives**

1. Students will be able to analyze the term "monster" within a short story.

### **Materials**

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Copies of "Mark of the Beast"
- Copies of "What Was It?"

### **Strategies**

- Quick-write
- Small group work

### **Procedures**

1. Write journal prompt on the board: "What was the key difference between any one of the film representation and the novel? Why?"
2. Quick-write: students respond to the prompt on the board. (5 min.)
3. Divide students into four groups, two get "Mark of the Beast" and two get "What Was It?" The groups read through these together and discuss them in relation to the term "monster." Groups will nominate a note-taker to write their thoughts about the text. (45 min.)
4. Assign homework: *Frankenstein* pages 57-86.

### **Evaluation**

1. Through collection of each groups' notes, I will evaluate each group ability to trace and analyze the term "monster" within a short story.

## **Day 7**

### **Objectives**

1. Students will be able to discuss how “transgression” appears in a historical context.
2. Students will be able to present this information to their classmates.

### **Materials**

- Notes students compiled
- Pen/Pencil & Paper

### **Strategies**

- Presentations
- Annotations

### **Procedures**

1. Each group will present their information to the class in a 5 minute presentation. While groups are presenting, the rest of the students will be taking notes about the presentations. (30-45 min.)
2. With time left, we will briefly debrief and discuss each of the topics presented. (5-20 min.)

### **Evaluations**

1. Through viewing the presentations, I will evaluate each student’s ability to discuss “transgression” in a historical context.
2. Through viewing the presentations, I will evaluate each groups ability to adequately convey their information to the rest of the class.

## Day 8

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to identify the characteristics of a compare and contrast essay.
2. Students will be able to write their own compare and contrast essay.

### Materials

- Text books
- Copies of *Frankenstein*
- Venn diagrams

### Strategies

- Lecture
- Annotations
- Pair activity

### Procedures

1. Students will take notes while I lecture the characteristics of a compare and contrast essay. I will discuss key words and phrases that signify a compare and contrast essay and talk about what I will be looking for in their papers. (25 min.)
2. In pairs, students will be asked to fill out a Venn diagram and compare and contrast Victor and the creature. (25 min.)
3. Assign homework: *Frankenstein* pages 86-115.

### Evaluations

1. Through looking at students' notes, I will evaluate if they are able to identify the characteristics of a compare and contrast essay.
2. Upon collecting their final papers, I will evaluate if students are able to write their own compare and contrast essay.



## **Day 9**

### **Objectives**

1. Students will be able to discuss the novel in a meaningful manner.
2. Students will be able to dramatize a scene in the novel.

### **Materials**

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journal
- Copies of *Frankenstein*

### **Strategies**

- Quick-write
- Story drama

### **Procedures**

1. Write the prompt on the board: "What do you believe was the creature's motivation for killing Victor's new bride? Did the creature achieve his goal?"
2. Quick-write: students will respond to the prompt. (5 min.)
3. Students will be placed into groups where they will have to determine the most important elements of their scene and dramatize them. (30 min.)
4. Students will perform their dramatizations. (15 min.)

### **Evaluations**

1. Through observation, I will evaluate whether or not students are able to discuss the novel in a meaningful way.
2. Through viewing their performances, I will evaluate if the students were able to dramatize the scene.

## **Day 10**

### **Objective**

1. Students will make progress on their essays.

### **Materials**

- Copies of *Frankenstein*

### **Strategies**

- Work day
- Student/Teacher Conferencing

### **Procedures**

1. Students will spend the period working on their essays. (50 min.)
2. I will meet with each student individually to check in on their progress and answer any questions.
3. Assign homework: *Frankenstein* pages 115-158.

### **Evaluation**

1. Through conferencing with each student, I will be able to gauge whether or not the students are making progress with their essays.

## Day 11

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to use feedback from peers and the teacher to make their papers stronger.

### Materials

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Rough draft of their persuasive essays

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- Peer editing
- Student/Teacher conferencing

### Procedures

1. Write the prompt on the board: "Do you find that peer editing helps you? Why or why not?"
2. Quick-write: students respond to the prompt. (5 min.)
3. Students will exchange their papers with 3 other classmates and give one another constructive feedback. (45 min.)
4. As students are working, I will meet with each of them briefly to check in and see what issues are happening in their papers, and give suggestions to help improve their essays.
5. Assign homework: *Frankenstein* pages 158-179.

### Evaluation

1. Through collection of both the rough drafts and final essays, I will evaluate whether or not students were able to use the feedback given to them from classmates and their teacher to help make their papers stronger.

## Day 12

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to state and support why they believe the novel to be either "horror" or "terror."
2. Students will be able to verbalize their opinions of the novel, characters, and story line.

### Materials

- Chalkboard/Whiteboard
- Journals
- Copies of *Frankenstein*

### Strategies

- Quick-write
- Small group discussion
- Large group discussion

### Procedures

1. Write prompt on the board: "What was your honest opinion of the novel?"
2. Quick-write: students respond to the prompt. (5 min.)
3. In small groups, students discuss their feelings about the book. (20 min.)
4. As a class, we'll decide whether the novel is "horror" or "terror." Discuss the novel as a whole. (20 min.)
5. In the time left, I will introduce the film the class will be watching. (5 min.)

### Evaluations

1. Through discussion, I will evaluate whether or not students are able to state and support why they believe the novel to be "horror" or "terror."
2. Through observation and discussion, I will evaluate whether or not students are able to successfully articulate their own opinions.



## **Day 13-14**

### **Objective**

1. Students will be able to identify similarities and differences between the novel *Frankenstein* and the Robert DeNiro film version.

### **Materials**

- Copy of *Frankenstein* (1994) DVD
- Venn diagram

### **Strategies**

- Film
- Annotating

### **Procedures**

1. Students will watch the film *Frankenstein*, and compare the similarities and differences from the film and the novel in a Venn diagram. (50 min.)

### **Evaluation**

1. Through collection of Venn diagrams, I will evaluate whether or not students are able to identify the similarities and differences between the novel and the film.

## Day 15

### Objectives

1. Students will be able to identify similarities and differences between the novel *Frankenstein* and the Robert DeNiro film version.
2. Students will be able to verbalize their opinions on the film compared to the novel.

### Materials

- Copy of *Frankenstein* (1994) DVD
- Venn diagrams
- Copies of *Frankenstein* novels

### Strategies

- Film
- Annotating
- Large group discussion

### Procedures

1. Students will finish the film *Frankenstein* and will identify similarities and differences between the film and the novel on their Venn Diagrams. (20-30 min.)
2. As a class, we will discuss the similarities and differences that the students' noticed, and how they impacted meaning. (20-30 min.)
3. Students will turn in their final essays.

### Evaluations

1. Through the collection of the Venn diagrams, I will evaluate whether or not students were able to identify similarities and differences between the novel and the film.
2. Through discussion, I will evaluate whether or not the students are able to verbalize their opinions about the film compared to the novel.

## “Transgression” Paper Rubric

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>Content</b>	<b>Logical Development</b>	<b>Sentence Structure</b>	<b>Grammar, Punctuation, Spelling</b>
<b>Superior (A) or Good (B)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Significantly central idea clearly defined, and supported with concrete, relevant detail</li> <li>•Clear explanation of relationship of detail with central idea or paragraph topic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Theme planned so it progresses in stages, and develops with originality and attention to emphasis</li> <li>•Paragraphs effectively developed</li> <li>•Transitions between paragraphs effective.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Unified, forceful, varied.</li> <li>•Reflects parallel structure, active voice, emphasis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•A few grammar or punctuation errors, but does not distract from or confuse the meaning of the paper.</li> </ul>
<b>Average (C)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Central idea apparent but trivial or too general</li> <li>•Central idea supported with concrete detail, but detail repetitious, sketchy or irrelevant</li> <li>•Poor explanation of relationship of detail with central idea or paragraph topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Plan apparent, but not fulfilled; strays off point</li> <li>•Paragraphs usually effective</li> <li>•Transitions between paragraphs clear but abrupt, mechanical, or monotonous</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Correct, but lacking in reflecting parallel structure, active, voice, emphasis, unification, forcefulness and variety.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Prevalence of grammar, punctuation or spelling errors that occasionally detract from and confuse the meaning of the paper.</li> </ul>

<b>Unacceptable (D-F)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Central idea lacking, confused, or unsupported by concrete and relevant details</li> <li>•Lacking explanation of relationship of detail with central idea or paragraph topic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Plan and purpose of theme not apparent; undeveloped or developed with irrelevance, redundancy, or inconsistency</li> <li>•Paragraphs incoherent, not unified, or undeveloped</li> <li>•Transitions between paragraphs unclear and ineffective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Not unified, incoherent, run-on, incomplete, monotonous, immature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Frequent grammar, punctuation and/or spelling errors that completely distract from the meaning of the paper.</li> </ul>
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**Total: \_\_\_\_\_/100**

\*Adapted from a rubric obtained in Dr. Hartman's English 395 course.